



A VICTORIOUS DEFEAT

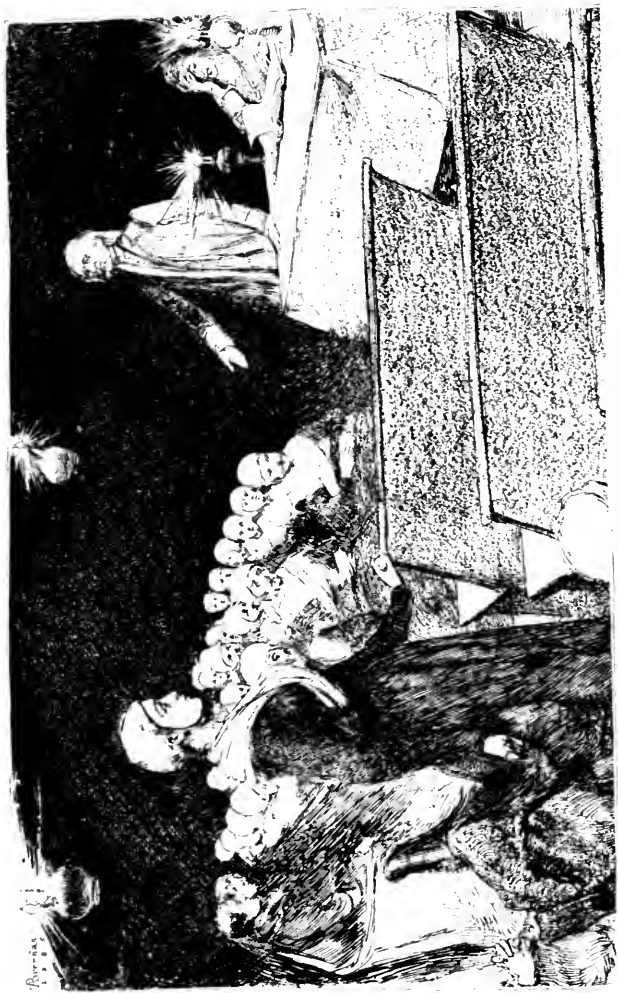
BALESTIER



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“One of our ordinances forbids the marriage of a member of the society with a stranger; another, clandestine betrothals.”

A
VICTORIOUS DEFEAT

A Romance

BY WOLCOTT BALESTIER

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A VICTORIOUS DEFEAT.

CHAPTER I.

IN the uncertain glory of a failing April day, Owen March stood before a door in the village of Judea, and let fall its knocker. His imagination, which went forward with a vague interest, as he rapped, to meet those with whom the opening of the door would make him acquainted, stood still with a mild shock when no footsteps answered his summons. But he lifted the reclining lamb again quite patiently, and waited once more for a response. As it did not come, he let his eyes wander down the street up which he had just come. It was a thoroughfare full of entertainment for one who saw it for the first time. March regarded it attentively for some minutes, during which he once more caused the little brass figure to make gentle inquiry of the dilatoriness of the house's inmates. When this knock also proved fruitless, he turned his glance toward the garden, endeavoring to bask beneath him in the stingy sunlight. As he looked, he was aware that the solitude was abruptly peopled. A young girl emerged from an arbor which he could see among the bare shrubs sur-

rounding it in the midst of the enclosure. He had time to observe her as she came, for she often stooped to pluck some early spring flower, and did not perceive him. She was compactly and rather largely framed. Her face, as it showed itself to him, in unconscious repose, was possessed by a certain dignity and seriousness, touched with a curious grace. Its lines were strikingly regular; in her fair full cheeks a faint color showed. The pensive calm that March felt in her expression may have been partly the result of her unusual dress, for her hair was entirely concealed beneath a close-fitting white coif, a stainless neckerchief was crossed upon her breast, and she was perfectly simply attired in a gown of bluish gray. This dress, which touches the most indifferent form with a neutral shadow of beauty, illumined this girl with a singular fairness. March at once guessed that it was the Moravian costume, but if the figure moving toward him was, as he supposed, Dr. Van Cleef's daughter, he was surprised to see her in this attire. He would not have known to what to refer his impression that he should find this young lady, of whom he had heard so much, habited in altogether the worldly way; probably, however, it had been merely an inference from the ample suggestions which his cousin, Frederick Lincoln, had let fall touching her character. March had the sense of tearing up a foolish mental photograph as she came nearer. The original was hopelessly different, but it was not a disappointing difference. When she bent scarcely a dozen feet from him to pull away the leaves matted upon a bed of crocuses, still not observing him, he experienced a humorous feeling of more absolute neglect than the silence of the house had given him. But in a moment

she raised her clear, serene eyes, and encountered his waiting smile. Her color deepened for an inappreciable moment, and she halted suddenly, with the damp leaves in her hand. She was quite tall, but all her motions were graceful. The little gesture with which she held the leaves away from her seemed to him indescribably pretty.

"My father is visiting a patient at a distance, if you wished to see him," she said, after a moment. "But he will be back soon. I hope you have not been kept waiting long."

"I've done very well," answered March, glancing down at her where she stood in the garden at a little distance from the high stoop. "It is very good of you to live in so interesting a village, Miss Van Cleef."

She looked up with a fresh light in her sensitive eyes. They seemed to be groping for a clew to the easy confidence of the young stranger before her. As she glanced at him with keen, quiet regard, a sudden thought appeared to pass through her mind, for she dropped the leaves and moved quickly toward him.

But March had already said, "You are going to tell me that I have the advantage of you. I don't mean to keep it, however. I am——"

"Pardon me," she interrupted ; "I am very stupid. I think I need not trouble you to tell me. You are——" She paused. "Are you not—? Perhaps I venture. It may not be——" She hesitated again, and seemed to be ploughing up her memories.

March stood on the porch above, smilingly awaiting her conclusion, and she glanced up at him with interrogative archness, as she said, "Yet it must be," with a firmness which decided nothing. "No ; I'll not vent-

ure it." She gave a little, laughing sigh, looking in study at the foot with which she corrected a wandering crocus bloom.

"But you guess rightly."

"Ah, how can you say? You might be a dozen different persons."

"I don't know," answered March, with enjoyment.

"Do you think I am?"

"I know a thousand persons who you are not," she urged, with a conscious pleasure in the repartee.

Was this bright illogic issuing from a young woman arrayed in plain gray and wearing a nun-like cap? March asked himself. "There are unquestionably billions, if we may believe the census," he returned. "The thought overwhelms one with a sense of insignificance. I hesitate to introduce so small a unit: it seems a little like the presumption of coming forward with a minority report."

"Pray do, sir!" she said with a sudden withdrawing, born of the saving apprehension that she might indeed be as mistaken as she seemed to fear.

"Must I abet your doubts? I am Owen March, Miss Van Cleef, and I am the bearer of a letter to your father."

"From Lady Amprey? Then I was right. We are very glad to see you, Mr. March. Your credentials have preceded you. Lady Amprey wrote us, and we have been looking for your coming." She ended with a frank smile and put forth her hand, an amicable token, which March hastened to accept by descending the steps and placing himself beside her.

"I ought to invite you into the house, I suppose, Mr. March; but I credit you with a preference for this

pleasant air. Perhaps you don't think it pleasant, but it is—at least for us. The sun is not a perfectly amiable body with us, but it has its humane impulses, and this is the result of one of them."

She spoke of the chagrin which her father would feel that he should be absent at the time of his arrival, and then, as they strolled into one of the errant and unrelated paths, "Lady Amprey seemed very sweet," she exclaimed, "when she came to visit us in New York. I was quite young, and she was different—yes. But she had real charm, I am sure. She was very gentle, and courteous and fine," she mused, with a sigh, which was not envious, but which March thought might be called emulative.

"Lady Amprey is extremely agreeable," he said, aloud. "I trust you will not think her less so when you find to what she has exposed you."

"Yourself?" inquired Constance, with a mysterious smile. "Ah, we shall see!"

March's amiable opinion of Lady Amprey was of old standing. It was not due to the shooting which she had been able to offer him when he spent his Eton and his Oxford vacations with her; but the shooting was very good. His regard for her was entirely the product of her own admirable qualities. She was a widow and she was forty; but she had the vivacity of youth. Her attitude toward him was that of a sprightly young aunt. She was in fact a cousin of high attenuation to some people who were cousins of his. Her relationship with Dr. Van Cleef was upon the other side, and did not connect him with March in the remotest degree. But when she found that he was going to America, and especially that he was likely to visit Dr.

Van Cleef upon some particularly disagreeable business, she made haste to give him a letter to her relative. March had left England rather suddenly, or he would have bidden farewell to Lady Amprey in person. As it was he had written her upon the eve of his departure, telling her that he had been asked to go out to explore the promising colonies recently forfeited by His Majesty for a certain company of young men of his acquaintance who had been led to think of immigrating to them. They were very good fellows, with very small fortunes he said, and he intimated that he might join them if he found the prospect favorable. Lady Amprey was not surprised. Those who reasoned only from a knowledge of Owen March's position were amazed ; but Lady Amprey had known him, since his father, Sir John, had sent him as a boy from one of the West Indies, of which he was Governor, to Eton ; and she had perceived long ago that his aims and theories were as far as possible from those common at the time to the second sons of baronets. She was aware that he kept a particularly warm place in his heart for America, and she had admonished Sir John early in her acquaintance with his son that he would some day make an American of himself. She added that it was reasonable to expect something of the sort, for one's mother was not a native of the colonies for nothing. This mild pleasantry was intended for Sir John, who in marrying an American girl with whom he became acquainted in one of his numerous voyages to the United States, had done an undeniably peculiar thing. It was a very successful and charming marriage, as was admitted on all sides when the county families, on the return of the pair to England, called upon the high-

bred woman whom Sir John had made his wife, and saw the two together ; but this was easily accounted for when it was remembered that in fact her father had been born in England, and of an irreproachable family. She was apparently American enough, however, to bestow upon her son some strikingly un-English tendencies, and these had exhibited themselves so clearly to Lucy Amprey, while he was still in his teens, that she was prepared for almost anything which he might do. This plan of colonization was quite in the direction of her previsions, and by so much grateful to her prophetic soul. But the satisfaction of being able to say, "I told you so," which at its best was adulterated with regret for his departure, was almost entirely alloy when she came to the postscript of his letter. "I have been offered," he wrote, "at the last moment, quite without warning, the position of correspondent of the *Republic* in America. It is, you know, the single newspaper champion of the United States on this side, and you can understand that I shall be glad to say my say in it. Over here we don't understand the people who have grown away from us across the water. I say *we*, hoping that my fancies about them may be sufficiently justified when I reach there to say You ; but I am at least anxious to comprehend and know them which comes nearer explaining the *Republic's* choice of me than anything else perhaps. But it doesn't explain it. I have a suspicion that you are unconsciously the explanation. You know how you have been accustomed to repeat my mutterings against the corn-laws, and some other things which are making our dear England an undesirable place of residence, as a kind of joke. Perhaps the editor of the *Republic* has taken them seri-

ously ; though it is hard to fancy how a man whom the Government prefers should usually read his seditious journal behind prison bars can be in the way of hearing Lady Amprey's gossip.

"I imagine that, in fact, he fixed upon me in desperation, because he could not at the moment get out of his prison to find any one else. The position is at present held by a doctor in Judea, a Moravian settlement in Pennsylvania—Dr. Van Cleef—a young man, I suppose, who finds that a growing practice leaves little time for musing on paper. Well, *I* shall have time ; for, after leaving New York, where my mother's people are, I shan't know a soul in the country, and, with the best intentions, I can hardly do much exploring for my intending colonists in the long evenings. Somehow I fancy the evenings will be very long over there."

Lady Amprey's feelings upon perusing this would not have been guessed by a reader of the letter of introduction to her kinsman which she immediately wrote and dispatched to March. She was entirely silent as to the position and the appointment, devoting herself conscientiously to the praise of March. But her sentiments were made plain in the enclosure to the young man himself.

"It is very nice of them to appoint you," she wrote, after a very sparing use of her right to impute to herself the art of divination, upon his fulfilment of her prophecy, "but your young doctor chances to be a man of nearly seventy, and my cousin. Since it must be some one, it may altogether best be you, but I could wish you were to displace a younger and less charming man. You will say that I am prejudiced by kinship. But Dr. Van Cleef is at least my tenth cousin, if there is

such a thing ; and, if it were true, you ought to be the last man to complain of my sense of the ties of consanguinity. He is such a fine old gentleman as I fancy you will scarcely believe they make across the water ; and he has an interesting daughter. Be careful that you don't fall in love with her. It's true I saw her several years ago, and there is no telling what she may have blossomed into. But it can't be anything disagreeable. I've seldom met any one who seemed to understand herself better. She knows precisely whither she is going. Pray see to it that you do !

"I repeat, they are charming people—for Americans, extraordinarily so. My distant cousinship—the mother's branch, of course—was a license to perfect openness, and in the course of my visit, which I assure you was not brief, I should have discovered any ugly little angles, if they had any. But they haven't.

"Adieu, my dear boy ; I envy you the prospect of seeing people without angles. So many on my calling list are constantly tempting me to murmur, 'The square of the hypotenuse of a right angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.' Is that it ?

"Sincerely, LUCY AMPREY."

Lady Amprey's light-hearted plaint reached March just before he set sail, and there was no time to assure her that of course he should not displace her kinsman. There was not even so much time as would have enabled him to inform the *Republic* of his determination. But when, six weeks later, he reached New York, he put both Lady Amprey and the imprisoned editor of the *Republic* into possession of his intentions. The voyage, whose leisure had given opportunity for a great

deal of reflection, had left him with many hours which he could only devote to a most active regret for the impulse which had led him to accept a post which was unquestionably very dear to an old man. He read this between the lines of Lady Amprey's letter, and his only wish was that he had read it between the lines of the proposal of the *Republic's* editor.

He was quite conscious that he was surrendering an opportunity—one which meant more perhaps to a young man of his aims and ideas than it would have meant to almost any one else—but to give it up was immensely less costly than to keep it. It was not at all a matter of philanthropy, or of sentimental kindness; nor had it anything in common with the unlicensed benevolence which is generous a great many times a week for the sake of seeing itself in the act. He simply could not do it; and having yielded his chance he spent no mourning upon it. March had long ago investigated himself, had taken account of life, and the outlook had instructed him that the reasonable thing was to be happy.

He had many letters to write on his arrival in New York besides those already named. In his capacity of spyer-out of this land of promise, he was, of course, obliged to render an early account of his impressions of its chief city; and outside the little company whose agent he was, several of his friends (sons of noblemen in all degrees after the first), who entertained a curiosity about America, had asked him to send them his earliest ideas regarding it, as if they were commissioning him to dispatch a buffalo robe by return packet. The only letter which he wrote for his own satisfaction was to his father. To him March felt that he owed an especial debt, beyond that larger obligation which he

had always eagerly recognized, for the extreme reasonableness of his attitude upon the question of this American tour. He was sensible that his republican theories, however mild they might appear to himself, who had the advantage of knowing how much more radical they once had been, must seem to plough dangerously deep to his dear father's delightfully confident Toryism. He felt that an English baronet may fairly have his feelings upon his second son's announcement of his belief that the United States exemplifies the most excellent form of government in the world ; and he was sincerely obliged to him that he had not attempted to pare his squareness down to roundness, or in any other way, except, as Sir John said, "by giving him his head," to change his tendencies. March knew that his private word to himself had been that if one's son could not do as one desired, it was the next lower point of felicity to wish what one's son desired, and this was so admirably fair and generous that March had several times almost resolved to give up the voyage and his plans as a sacrifice to such moderation. But it had ended in his going ; and he was now writing his father some of the things which he had found difficult to say, in praise of his kindness.

His departure had indeed caused both his father and mother real distress, not so much from dislike of the journey itself, as from dread of its consequences. If it should result in his permanent residence in the country his mother's stout patriotism gave her no comfort in the prospect, and to his father's royalism it was an inexpressibly painful contingency. It would have been simply shocking to both of them if they had not, as it were, dwelt with the possibility for several

years before it came so near. March's wishes were obvious enough when he returned from Heidelberg ; but he had not pressed them. He had been content to look about him and measure the world and himself for a time ; for he had become imbued in Germany with a certain disrespect for the opinions of the moment, since he was constantly finding them in his young man's state of flux, discredited by the light which he got from the next.

His feelings about America had certainly passed through more than one stage within his memory. As a boy, before he left the West Indies where he had been born, he had been much attracted to the country of his mother. The nation then trembling out of its swaddling clothes a few hundred miles from him, was undeniably full of interest to the onlooker. That onlooker being a thoughtful and imaginative boy, with an early exhibited taste for the problems of government, it is intelligible that a comparatively faint zephyr should blow the latent Americanism in his blood into an obstinate blaze. This atmospheric impulse was furnished him in unnecessary vigor, when, after a season spent at Eton, and a longer one at Oxford, he opened his mind to the subtleties of German thinking at Heidelberg. It was, to speak accurately, not a direct impulse which was imparted to him ; there were certain limitations touching the inculcation of republicanism in German universities at this time. But the tone of the place was distinctly liberal ; a breeze of truth seemed always to be blowing through its halls, expelling cobwebs and rending fallacies ; and the doors of one's intelligence must have been barred with much care to have avoided the message.

March, whose openness was as the openness of the honeycomb, found himself peculiarly susceptible to the influence of this missionary and informing breeze. The study of Political Science, then struggling toward its own, gave the special impetus which was lacking to his feelings, and made him presently a brilliantly red republican. In the further time that he spent at Heidelberg his ideas were naturally modified by much the same sanative power which had equipped him with his theories, and he returned to England and took up his residence with his father, who had laid aside the glories of the gubernatorial function, a very hearty republican, indeed, but one of a much less inflamed type than he had once liked to believe himself.

This pale form of faith, however, took on, it may be believed, a sufficiently high color, to his father's alarm, and during the three years that intervened between his return to England and his departure from it, his opinions gave the baronet considerable anxiety. He held, in the course of this time, many memorable conversations with his son. Owen pretended no more reverence than he felt for the laws and institutions of his country, which made possible the general distress, and the threatening bubblings of that political pot which at the time came so near boiling over. But he tried to treat his father's prejudices tenderly, and always endeavored to put his revolutionary sentiments as gently as possible.

"Ah, father!" cried he, as they came into the house one day after one of the walks during which these colloquies usually went on, "you don't know what a mild radical I am. Pray, don't think me a Reign of Terror man, and that sort of thing. I've not the ghost of a

wish to subvert society; I find it much too charming an institution. And in a general division of property, I don't see how I should come out any better off. There are worse things, perhaps, than being the younger son of a gentleman who has the fortune to own such a park as that"—he indicated the beautiful expanse of turf before them as they paused on the steps—"certainly when that gentleman has the uncommon goodness to be Sir John March. What do you think, father?" laughed the young republican, as he took the old man by both his shoulders, and forced him to give back his smile. The father's glance dwelt admiringly on his son's stalwart form.

"I think you are a much better son than royalist, my dear boy."

Once, when March had been speaking of the unwisdom of a form of government "under which the poor are without a vote, and in the best circumstances can hardly own the soil, which they improve for others from year to year," Sir John rejoined: "There is something in what you say. I have often thought that matters might be improved. But I don't go quite so far. I don't know whether one of the results of your observation may have been that I am myself one of the 'others,' as you call them. What if I say that I weakly prefer to be one of them?"

"I should say that I trust you will not live to see anything that you would not like, dear father!"

It has been said that Lady March, as well as her husband, had in a manner lived for some time with the possibility of exactly the event which had now occurred; but she had, of course, held no such talks as Sir John with Owen, and when her son's intention was first an-

nounced to her, the philosophy with which she had tried to fortify herself in advance resolved itself simply into tears. She wondered why she had not long ago perceived how certain it was ; but it was, perhaps, best that she had not known, for surely only those malevolent spirits who hope one day to rule the world by some such code as prevails in Old Ladies' Homes can wish to make a mother's ideas of her son include the obvious.

When Lady March had conquered the bit of weakness with which she had met the first intelligence of her son's deplorable plan, she accepted it with a kind of equanimity. After all, she told herself, she was glad to have Owen visit her native land, if it did not end in his remaining there ; and she was soon going about with a fair counterfeit of cheerfulness, and setting herself to smooth her son's path among her countrymen, as far as letters of introduction, and the like kindly documents, could accomplish that end.

To March, the most fruitful of these amiable papers was that which made him known to his cousin, Frederick Lincoln, and his agreeable mother, Lady March's sister. They lived in one of the most perfect products of the colonial idea in architecture which March found in New York. The house was generously made, and full of a dignity and simplicity of its own. Through its long windows it looked upon the Battery and the beautiful prospect beyond, and in the autumn days March often sat upon the balcony, with his aunt and her daughters—for Lincoln had several sisters—and watched the concourse of courtly men beneath them, who, having accomplished the deliberate business of the day in Wall and South, in Pine and Cedar Streets,

and Maiden Lane, joined their wives and daughters in walking in the green park. The movement up town had begun, and had carried fashion as far as Park Place ; but Mrs. Schuyler Lincoln was one of the inheritors of the sagacious tradition that a house facing the Battery, the still uncheapened bay, and the noble outlook beyond, was the great privilege.

The two young men had met as boys on the island, under the mild rule of March's father ; and Lincoln pretended to remember March as an uncommonly disagreeable child. This fortunately did not prevent him from being very agreeable to his cousin, and March in a short time said to himself that his cousin was an altogether charming companion. As he knew every one, he was acquainted, March presently found, with the Van Cleefs, and was surprised to know that his cousin had a like pleasure in prospect.

"I used to know them," he said, "extremely well. That was during Mrs. Van Cleef's life-time, of course, After that they moved to—what's the name of the place—Jerusalem—Jericho?"

"Judea?" asked March.

"Judea; and Dr. Van Cleef is practising his profession there. He was never thoroughly happy here, I often fancied. He was a kind of apostate, I believe. The epithet sounds harsh, doesn't it? but it means very little. He was a Moravian, who wanted a broader field; he always seemed attached to his profession, at all events, and I suppose he felt he might accomplish more for others and himself outside the society village. Of course, that was scarcely consistent with full membership in their organization, so he simply separated from them and came here. He was our best physician, my

mother says ; she wept at his departure. For my part, it did not increase my personal happiness. I had a great liking for him. He had a curious daughter, who used to interest me. She was very young when she left New York, and I've often wondered how she turned out. I never knew a more individual girl. She was not so pretty ; that was not her distinction : but you felt her presence when she was a mere child. She bore herself uncommonly well ; and she had such aspirations. Poor little girl ! They reached to the clouds. I used to be afraid for the time that should shatter them. I wonder where they are now—perhaps still climbing. You ought to know her. Excuse me, I forget, you will. I congratulate you, then. She was a little princess at seventeen. Fancy what she must be now."

"A queen, probably."

"It's not so impossible. I should like very well to know ; I wish I were going with you to Judea," said the young man, musingly.

"I wish you were," exclaimed March, heartily.

Lincoln did not go with him to Judea, but he arranged to meet him there if the time of his visit should coincide with his yearly vacation—a thing of highly variable occurrence and the most elastic duration. One chance and another pushed Judea toward the bottom of March's list, and it was spring before he reached it. Meanwhile, he had seen the United States as thoroughly as was then possible, and with eager and increasing interest, which he successfully communicated to his transatlantic audience. It vindicated and outran all his visions. It was a chrysalis from which almost any butterfly might be expected ; and when he had at last

surveyed it all, and was ready to make his journey to Judea, he felt himself justified in asserting, with some positiveness, to those who waited for his final word across the water, that the process of assisting to strip the golden cocoon was likely to prove a profitable one.

To Judea he went with a certain curiosity and interest, roused by the engaging pictures of Lady Amprey and Lincoln. He went, also, with something infinitely more valuable; for the assurance of the editor of the *Republic*, that Dr. Van Cleef should not be disturbed in his position, gave him a freer conscience.

CHAPTER II.

THIS young Englishman, walking by Constance's side through Dr. Van Cleef's garden, would certainly have struck a Moravian spectator, if there had chanced to be one, as a supremely unusual figure, for many reasons. But he would have engaged the attention of an onlooker with no such traditions and prejudices as a Moravian's, for his height, which was unusual, and his strong well-knit frame, gave him, taken in connection with his admirable bearing, an uncommonly positive presence. His eyes were the index of a sincere spirit, but they were perhaps not notable in any other way, unless it is worth while to add that a subtle and often rather irrelevant humorous twinkle had its home in them. His brown hair hung loosely about his head. Doubtless his face was not handsome ; but it did not seem improbable that certain persons might so describe it. It was, at least, distinctly earnest, and its firm lines were drawn with delicacy and security. It was a strikingly genuine face.

March's dress was not modish ; it did not insist. But he was very well dressed indeed. This felicitous point may have been of less easy maintenance, in those days of the gradual disappearance of ruffles and knee-breeches, than it is found in this year of grace ; at all events, its effect in the case of Owen March was a kind of distinction.

The garden to which Constance was introducing him, struck him as extraordinary. It was a garden of gardens. Its extent, the variety of its exhibition, and the care with which its achievements were nurtured and classified, seemed almost professional. Something of this he communicated to his companion. "Certainly," said she; "it is my father's passion. He seeks out new species, and cares for the old, with the enthusiasm which other men spend upon books, and violins, and butterflies, and what not."

"It's a pretty enthusiasm."

"Is it not? One is very dull, don't you think, to whom flowers say nothing? But there is very little now. You should see it in summer. I hope your business in America is not important. Father will want to keep you until he can show it you."

They walked on through the walks, thickly bordered with hedges of mock-orange, which had less stiffness than they wear in gardens whose beds are laid out by triangulation. They came upon a German who was engaged in loosing the earth from a great number of pots, and planting the green shoots which the damp clay embraced in a fallow space prepared for them. With this man Miss Van Cleef paused, to decide a horticultural problem which appeared of immediate importance. As they went on, "You are at least the daughter of an enthusiast," commented March. "One might almost say you had some of the original passion."

"Yes, I am fond of it all," admitted Constance, "and one must do something. You may have observed that we are not richly supplied with means of entertainment," she went on a trifle bitterly. "One cannot always read and spin, and sew, and—yes the garden is

a great resource. I scarcely know what I should do without it."

The paths which were endless, reminded March in their frequent doublings and windings of a labyrinth; and it occurred to him, that accompanied by such a companion, that ancient form of puzzle was by no means without its excellent qualities. A series of shrubs replaced the graceful hedge as they came into the more secluded regions of the garden, and before a rather odd bush among these March presently paused. "This is not an American shrub?"

"I think not," said Constance. "Look at the little label in the ground there. There are a great many foreigners; father has an especial fondness for them."

"It is a Hollander," said he, bending to read the neatly inscribed Latin on the finger-length of pine that stood sentinel before the shrub. "I thought I remembered it. It's very pretty when it blossoms, and I attach a little romance to it. It grows in the meadows, near the dikes, I think. The romance is not mine; it belonged with the shrub to a young Dutch student, whom I knew at Heidelberg. His betrothed was a trim little Hollander, who lived with her mother, in a wretched sort of way, up in some unspeakably lofty rooms at the Hague. She loved the shrub with the small remnant of heart that was not given to Hans and her mother—she had some special sentiment about it; it was their only flower, a memory of the country abundance they had left, and that sort of thing—and when she died—it was very sad; she had gone with her mother, a few stations out, with their pitiful earnings to meet Hans, who was coming home to marry her. Only her mother and a few others were saved. When she died, Hans

claimed the shrub, and took it back to his rooms at Heidelberg, and watched it with a dogged loyalty and a grim, hard sort of despair, that haunts me yet. He went himself, after a while, poor fellow, and one of his friends planted the shrub above him, and nursed it a little from time to time. It throve wonderfully, and bore every year the most perfect scarlet blossom. His friend had a sentiment about it, and left a bit of endowment with the authorities to preserve it always, I believe. I don't know but it's living yet."

"How good of you, Mr. March!"

"I didn't say it was I," asserted he, looking up from the gravel which he had been studying.

"Ah, but you can't deny it," she returned, smiling through a suspicious film.

A firm, slow step made itself heard approaching on the path behind them, and both turned. A gentleman whose white locks were shaded by a gray hat, with a far-reaching brim, and who carried a heavy cane, was advancing toward them.

"Father," said Constance, going to him as he came near, and taking his hand, "this is Mr. March."

"Indeed! You are very welcome, sir," said the elder gentleman, bowing in the manner of an earlier day, and grasping his hand. "You have come far to see us, and I am grieved that I should have chanced to be away at the time of your arrival. But my daughter—she has made you welcome, I trust. Yes, yes," he said, stroking her hand, as she stood rather proudly, March fancied, beside him. "Yes, Constance is a capital substitute; yes, a very good substitute," and he drew her to him absently and kissed her forehead. "Lady Amprey, sir—is she quite well? and your father, Sir

John? I fancy I remember seeing him once, long ago—yes thirty years since now, sir.” He regarded March meditatively, as he stroked his close-shaven face. “You are one of the Marchs of Devonshire? Yes, yes, so I thought, so I thought.” He sat down suddenly on a bench near. His daughter was beside him instantly. “You are not well, father!”

“Yes, my dear, perfectly, perfectly.” He smiled upon her, however, with weary eyes. “A little fatigued, that is all.”

“You have driven too far,” exclaimed she compassionately, “you must not do it. You should let Dr. Glick take these outside cases.” She had drawn from his pocket his handkerchief, and kneeling by his side, was touching his heated forehead with it as she spoke. “How did you find Christina’s baby?”

“John was unduly alarmed. It was a very mild attack.”

“And he let you drive twenty miles for nothing? Ah, poor father! It was shameful!”

March was standing near, drawing his gloves thoughtfully through his hands.

“We country physicians have our trials, sir,” said Dr. Van Cleef addressing him, “yes, yes, we have our trials.” He seemed to muse for a moment. “Come Constance, dear,” he exclaimed rising deliberately and throwing back his head as if to cast off his fatigue, “it is supper time. Go in and say to Barbara that we will sup in the arbor to-night; and let your aunt know. It will be warm enough I think, dear.”

It had been one of those gentle days which occasionally brighten the sullen Northern spring, and the sun was bidding the earth good-night with a suavity which it had not used since the last October.

Constance left them, and the doctor motioned the young man to a seat on the bench, and he sat down beside him. Each of his companion's expressions, and the smiles with which he emphasized them, seemed to March to repeat, "You are very welcome, sir;" and as they talked, and March watched the figure in gray vanishing up the path, and took upon his face the warm light of the setting sun playing through the hedge and budding trees and shrubs, he felt that there were several facts upon which he might fairly congratulate himself.

Constance came out to the table, which a maid servant was setting in the arbor, with a tall, slight lady of a certain age, dressed in the garb of the society, who was presently made known to March as Miss Cynthia Van Cleef, the doctor's sister.

"We are glad to see you, sir," she said precisely as they were introduced, and giving his hand a single sharp, downward, impulse, quickly released it, and folded her own shrivelled palms about her slim waist. During the meal which followed she remained quite silent, except to give occasional laconic orders to the young waitress, who seemed to stand in awe of her. Constance took her place at the head of the table, but it was clear that Miss Cynthia directed the domestic government.

"You have seen my garden, sir, at least, in part?" said March's entertainer amiably, as they sat drinking their tea in the warm, fading light, "Yes, Constance, I think, is fond of it herself; she is not unwilling to show it."

The sun bent its last soft rays upon the four persons gathered about the homely table, and stamped their long

shadows on the beaten earth floor, and beyond through the lattice work on the rich brown soil of a newly upturned flower bed. The hedge of silver behind which Constance sat scintillated in the mellow light, and the glassware grew pink under it. Miss Cynthia, who faced the sun, sat defending her weak blinking little eyes from its level glory with one thin hand, which was itself transparently pink in the light.

From where they sat they could see most of the village street. The house to which this garden was attached, bore a certain family resemblance to the others, but it was easily the handsomest in sight. Four tall chimneys sought the air above it like exclamation points, and an equal number of buttresses rose massively to its stone flanks as if to emphasize the honest firmness and squareness with which the building faced the observer, in a street of which it was not the only notable object. The houses were at a considerable distance apart, and in the vacant stillness that falls upon most villages at the cessation of labor, in the next hours before nightfall, each seemed standing in a separate silence. The occasional sound of footsteps on the hard-beaten earth walks scarcely disturbed the slumberous quiet. Two noble lines of maples threw out their branches over the roadway, and nodded their vagrant shoots with the hinted foliage of early spring to the many-paned windows. The larger limbs drooped in sturdy curves upon the roofs which were by no means the least striking thing in the street. Those which reached the eaves by an uninterrupted sweep turned up their noses at this point, with a saucy flounce, and were transfixed in perpetual *retroussé*; others more decorously surrendered to the dwelling's

front a portion of their forms, which straightway became concave and were dotted with windows. The least fantastic mode in house-tops seemed to be that angular structure, with the appearance of a carpenter's rule at odds with itself, known as the "gambrel." From all the dormer window gleamed, propped at anguishing inclines, and upon occasion lying prone along the shingles, like a basking alligator. Most of the buildings were of stone, though occasionally one was simply framed of hewn logs. With inscrutable parsimony, in the midst of an ample region of open land, all were placed full upon the street, and beside each door rose a flight of steps, terminated by a little square of flooring.

"I don't keep the garden for exhibition," said Dr. Van Cleef. "I am glad that any one who cares for flowers should see it; but its design is a perfectly selfish one, sir." His beneficent smile belied the statement. "I am content to admit that I keep it up for my private gratification. That is not a laudable object, you will say. No, it would not look well in a text. But at a certain age, a man must try to get along with fewer laudable objects; one must treat one's self with respect, even indulge one's self perhaps. That is my plan."

"You should begin to carry it out, father," said Constance; "one who goes out of his way to assume others' burdens, and drives twenty miles to remedy an imaginary complaint is hardly doing battle for the cause of selfishness."

"Well, well; the theory holds good still. I was speaking of my pleasures, dear. My duties are a different matter. Do you happen to know the *Republic*?" he asked of March, suddenly.

The young man flushed. "The—a London daily!" stammered he, "certainly, sir."

"That is one of my indulgences. You know they sympathize with us. The United States has no better friend. Yes, I write them—occasionally—with some regularity, I may say. It is a great interest for me—yes, yes, quite an interest," continued the old man absently, rubbing the snowy stubble on his chin, after a habit he had. "I have an intellectual recreation and a physical recreation you see: that and my garden. Yes, I enjoy it. But I suppose I shall have to give it up after a while," he said, abruptly, looking at March, whose eyes fell. "They will be sending over a younger man to replace me before long. I have my ideas, of course, but they are the ideas of the past. We have been growing very rapidly over here lately, Mr. March."

March was spared comment by an accident which at the moment befell a dish in the hands of the servant; but for the remainder of the meal his thoughts were extremely uncomfortable.

When they rose from the table he proposed to retire, but the Moravian was obdurately hospitable.

"The inn, sir! Have you not learned that the Americans have other ideas of hospitality?" inquired he gravely, "I will send for your portmanteau at once, sir. It is for you to say only how long you can consent to remain with us," the doctor ended with his beaming smile. "No, no!" he cried, at March's protest, "I shall take it as an affront, sir, if you return to the inn. That was very well for the moment—until we could meet, but now—you are Lady Amprey's friend, sir, and therefore mine."

March could only submit. For the day or two that he felt it right to remain, as a tribute to Lady Amprey, this arrangement was clearly pleasanter than his own. The inn he had found a trifle stuffy, though marvelously clean, in the Moravian manner, and he found his heart opening vaguely to Dr. Van Cleef, who was not only likable for himself, but had the additional advantage of having unconsciously allowed him to do him a kindness. But when, on the third day of his stay, not having made his intentions known to his entertainer, he went to secure his place in the coach, a letter was handed him from Mr. Frederick Lincoln. It appeared that he now found himself at liberty to take the respite of which he had spoken, from what he called "confinement at hard labor"—something which consisted in sitting under the shadow of a freshly-gilt sign, awaiting clients—and that his determination to give his English cousin the benefit of this holiday still held good. He was not to be looked for, however, it appeared, for some days. "Our stage coaches do not travel post-haste, my dear fellow, or in any other variety of haste known to travellers," he wrote " (this you may have discovered), and there is a charming uncertainty about the date of our meeting, not to mention the date of my departure. Pray don't expect me, for if you should intermit the occupation for an hour or so, I should come at that time." Upon reflection, March did not know why he should not await his gay cousin here. He should do a wrong to his entertainer's frank hospitality he felt, in doubting his welcome so long as he chose to stay. He had finished his tour of investigation ; he had purposely left this for the last. A large tract of land had been offered him a little to the south,

which he had not expected to visit. But if he waited he might go and return. He was inclined to believe it extraordinarily adapted to his colonizing design, and when Lincoln came, they could go somewhere for a fortnight before he need sail for England.

Having yielded to the abundant Moravian hospitality ; he made a point of seeing the best in it. Judea was exquisitely provincial, certainly, but that was part of its charm, and March at least would not have added a pennyweight of sophistication to it if he could. If it were to be complained that the life was absurdly narrow, March, in his invincible satisfaction for the moment with it, would have freely owned the truth of all that could be said in this direction, but he would have urged that one might sometimes grow a little tired of the broader life. One could always angle in the wide, swift currents ; it was interesting to whip the brooks occasionally. This was, of course, especially true when those brooks were American. The genuine hospitality was not an every day matter ; when one was in the luxurious enjoyment of it, for what could it be advantageously exchanged ?

His life from day to day was very simple, and though it embraced much observation in the direct line of his mission, seemed to have no other very large aim. Nevertheless he was fully occupied. There appeared to be a great many things in Judea that might be done with pleasure, and Dr. Van Cleef busied himself unwearyingly in searching these out and setting them before him.

"I want to drive you to the Old Basin this afternoon," he would say at breakfast ; or on another morning, "Constance, my dear, why not show Mr. March

Indian Gorge to-day ? Now there are the clock works, You have seen them ? Oh, of course, but not Moravian clock works ;” and “ we omitted the Widows’ Choir yesterday, Constance. You must take Mr. March through it. I want you to see our whole system, sir.” The doctor seemed to think some part of his duty left undone in a day for which he had provided no certain plan, and his repertoire was apparently exhaustless. But March enjoyed the days which were less carefully mapped at least as well ; and his issueless wanderings with Constance through the settlement ; and their morning talks in the garden had a value of their own which the pleasantest of their regularly schemed excursions—and they were certainly delightful in their way—quite lacked.

Constance did not permit their guest to disturb the even order of her daily occupations, however. In the afternoon she often spun—a graceful employment, at which, in the Moravian habit, she sang the *Spinne Lieder*. As she softly hummed the quaint airs which the church of the *Unitas Fratrum* has wisely provided for this, as for all the industries of her children, her daintily-made foot rose and fell in time, and while the easy motions of her head and figure recurred in harmony, one hand spanned the distaff as the other ran to and fro, drawing forth the slight thread, and returning. In the evening she was wont to sit before the great, cheery wood fire, the natural centre of their little circle. While her father read Miss Cynthia knitted, and March talked with Constance. At these times she was often skilfully elaborating some woman’s fancy in embroidery by the light of the massive candelabrum, or doing that more prosaic sewing which the laundresses of Judca were accustomed to render

weekly to the personal care of the housewife. Toward the close of the evening she would lay aside her work. As they sat thus confronting the flaming logs in the wide chimney-mouth, their talk was of many things; and if the literature or the art of which they occasionally spoke clung rather anxiously to English skirts, that was perhaps to be expected, though disappointing to March's adoptive patriotism. If America was to borrow altogether in matters of this sort, however, it was agreeable to discover that her daughters occasionally knew these loan collections, as it were, so very well.

March took the journey to the southward which he had proposed to himself, and spent several days in travelling about a region which impressed him as particularly favorable to his purpose. It was not only that the land was fat, and seemed waiting wistfully for the plough. There was the desirable neighborhood of cities, and the near presence of a considerable village; it was all in a particularly lovely valley. When he returned to Judea, he occupied some days in rendering an account of it to the proposing immigrants on the other side of the water. As he came down into the garden one morning, after finishing his work for the day, he perceived Constance bending over a flower-bed from which she was steadily plucking the weeds. She wore a pair of tattered gloves. For the first time since March had known her, she had laid aside the society cap, and wore an enormous straw sun-shade. She looked up to greet him, with her clear skin flushed from her exertion. Down somewhere in the depths of her great sun-bonnet glowed her face, and, as she bent it again upon the bed, March was left

a wide prospect of straw, brightened by the broad blue ribbon that attached the monstrous piece of millinery to her head.

"Have you been at work?" she asked, hollowly, from her umbrageous shelter.

"No; not in the sense that you are at work. I suppose I may say I've been playing rather hard. I've been writing."

"You do a great deal of writing."

"Why, I have to get up my reports, you know. I've been rather lazy recently. My journey furnished me with some material that I thought I might as well do up at once."

Constance went thoughtfully on with her weeding. After a moment, "Do you know, I've wondered if you would not be thought—how shall I say it—if they wouldn't think in England you had a good deal of purpose. That is a clumsy way of putting it. But," rising, "you know what I mean. Are they all as much in earnest over there?"

"You don't expect me to answer, do you?"

"I don't know that I do. But I should like you to."

"You offer me the opportunity of saying hard things of my countrymen, to the elevation of myself. That's very flattering; but I can hardly take advantage of it."

As she stood before him, he smiled at her laughing face, as it showed in the remote vista of the sun-bonnet.

"I didn't mean that you should reply directly. I was only giving you the text. I hoped you would talk."

"It would be a little like the Archbishop of Canterbury taking himself for a text, and preaching on the Primate of all England. But I'm willing to say, what

is obvious to you, that the entire body of British youth is not as anxious as I was to visit America."

"No, I see that," agreed Constance; "and what made you anxious? Will you let me ask that?"

"That's a long story. But I suppose I was a little impatient of our slow ways of coming at the truth, and I wanted to see a country that seemed to have received all the new messages, and to be exemplifying them in its government. I thought that a fine thing."

"And is it?"

"It seems the best we know, so far. I don't see how anything could be better. But it is only an experiment yet. No one can tell how it will come out."

"But you are willing to throw your fortunes in with it? You are ready to give up your certainties for our uncertainties?"

"Well, perhaps, our certainties are not so precious as you imagine. For my own part, I found them rather too certain."

"Yes, there is a good deal in the freedom we offer, I suppose. We say, in effect, 'You may be any one's equal, if you will.' That makes a tempting ground for work; it is a great opportunity for young men who have their way to make. I'm afraid I don't believe it all; but it is an immense chance, if your place is not already secure."

"You mean that my place *is* secure—that I have nothing to gain? Well, I don't know how I can blink that. I should do very well at home, I suppose. But in my position of one who would do very well as it is, it's rather my business, don't you think, to look about a little for those who are doing particularly ill as it is? These people that I am agent for are not so badly off;

though, to be frank, they are not wealthy. I don't know that I should have taken their commission if I had thought only of them. But there are hundreds of thousands of men in England, Miss Van Cleef, who are really badly off—very badly off, indeed. I couldn't tell you. They're not starving; but they're not living, and they have no voice in a government, which, with no deliberate evil intent—it's a very good government as they go; it has simply fallen into an extremely stupid way of doing things, and won't think—oppresses them very considerably. It is not the government, alone, I'm afraid; it is the whole system."

"But you are part of the system."

"Yes, that's it!"

"If it falls, you go with it."

"Why, yes, I fancy I should come in for my share of the ruin. But, as second son, I mightn't get very much. They don't, you know."

"Perhaps it would cost more than you think. I can't help saying that it seems a very generous attitude."

"No, it's only fair. And, even so, I probably sha'n't live up to it, whatever it is. If I'm in earnest, as you say, my earnestness has an unfortunate habit of going to sleep."

"It's only taking it's natural rest," smiled Constance. "I'm sure it has earned it."

"I wish I thought so," returned March, doubtfully, as they walked toward the orchard at the end of the garden.

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG Lincoln did not come, and made no sign, but March stayed on with exemplary patience. On a certain morning nearly a fortnight after his arrival, it must have been obvious to the least watchful of guests at Dr. Van Cleef's breakfast-table that some unusual force stirred the air. Miss Cynthia, to be sure, did not forget her usual exact greetings ; but there was a touch of haste in her invariably deliberate gait as she entered the dining-room, and she ate her breakfast with something more than her usual air of severe importance. It was noticeable that she failed to behead her egg, set in its china stand, with an accuracy which would have borne mathematical tests, and this was uncommon. She was clearly repressing an inclination to haste. During the morning various irregular sounds and odors issued from the kitchen, and Constance presently informed March that her father had sent forth invitations to a chosen few to drink tea with him that evening in his guest's honor.

Miss Cynthia's repeated journeys to the store-room, and jangling of keys, and rigorous oversight of the elaborate culinary operations, accompanied by readings from certain authentic cookery books to her exquisitely stupid assistants, were not without their result. The tea, from the kitchen point of view, was a notable success. Never were such tongues and hams, such flaky

biscuits, such golden honey, such luscious cakes! These dainties covered not too profusely a damask cloth, upon which the fruits of the earth were cunningly wrought; the spongy pat of cottage cheese did not entirely hide the impossible apple on whose plump cheek it was set, and one soon saw that the centipede, on the back of which rode the glittering tea-making equipment from which Constance ministered, was merely a luxuriant vine. The capacious pitcher of buttermilk, which Miss Cynthia had considerably provided for the unpampered tastes of the brethren, flanked the trembling mould of jelly; and above all towered in a great glass dish, whose bowl bore the relation to its support that the foliage of the palm bears to the trunk, Miss Cynthia's famous preserved pears. The thick facets of the glass gave back the light of the candelabra with an iridescence which rivalled that of the tinkling pendants of those splendid structures themselves. Mr. Keator, the minister of the settlement, gazing absently at its glitter, found a moisture gathering at length in his not too strong eyes. The smooth, creamy half-cones, swimming in their rich syrup, looked forth through the shining glass as if challenging the modest eldresses who sat facing them to reproduce them. The spacious dining-room was ceiled and wainscoted in oak, and some excellent paintings of fish and birds, in the well-established style, brightened the long panels. The usual monster open fire burned on the andirons, and its glowing shadows danced over the oaken walls, and flickered in the faces of those about the table.

Constance sat with her back to the fire, fronting her father, and commanding the brief line of guests on either side. The women were upon her left, the men

on her right. Their inexpressive countenances looked waitingly toward the clergyman, Mr. Keator, who had been placed next Dr. Van Cleef. The minister was looking about musingly, apparently absorbed in thoughts not directly related to the present scene, but at Constance's word he returned to himself, and giving her a grateful look, glanced about from habit, as if awaiting a deeper silence, and said a fervent blessing, followed by the verse appointed for the day in the Moravian calendar. Then Constance inquired of the elder next her his preferences as to milk and sugar, and the meal was begun by all with frank hunger. The company gathered about this abundant table was not large, but it lacked the easy freedom which is supposed to characterize small parties. It is comprehensible that kettle-drums were not quite usual things with these good people, and the presence of a stranger may also have had its effect, at least upon the eldresses. They did not often meet young men, and though this young man was certainly agreeable—as one of them said “he seemed to have the gift of talking uncommon”—they had not the facility which could teach them to adapt themselves to his foreign air. They accepted March a little less formally as the meal wore on, but no hospitable effort of Dr. Van Cleef's induced the sisters to take a more decided initiative in the conversation than was implied in making a timid inquiry or two of the stranger touching the conditions of life in England. One, a little bolder, began a serious conversation with Mr. Keator upon the state of Moravian missions in Greenland, but appearing to feel suddenly that this might be thought impolite as not including the guest of the evening, quickly paused. This sister was at the head of the Young Women's *Choir*,

and she was accompanied by the eldress who administered the like office among the widows. There were besides four other sisters, wives of the elders. March wondered what age these quiet women might have attained. The eye, as in the case of nuns of the Romish Church, refused to inform one. The countenances, gazing calmly from the prim white coifs, seemed singularly fresh and full. Their owners were probably over thirty, but how much? Perhaps ten years, perhaps forty. Who should say? Their dress was, if possible, an exaggeration of the shrinking from display characteristic of all the sisters; March noticed that the stuff of their gowns was coarser and darker than others whom he had seen.

"Have you visited Bristol, sir?" inquired the elder next March.

"I have passed through it, yes; are you familiar with the place, Elder Weiss?"

"No, no, oh no! we have a strong congregation there, that is all. I thought you might have met some of the brethren," said the elder, innocently. "But I suppose it is a large town."

"We have a good many congregations," said another brother, who had been made known to March as Brother Berg. "They are quite a deal scattered; but, if we could get them all together, it would be a goodly company. We are an old church, you know, sir. Most would not think that there was so many of us. We have mission stations in the West Indies, in Greenland, among the native Indians, and elsewhere. We try to do a good deal in missions. The Church has a strong hold in your country, as Elder Weiss says, sir; but we are best in Germany. There is where

we began. We rank fairly with the other sects there."

"It is not for us to boast of our strength, Brother Berg," reproved one of the elders.

There was more spasmodic talk of a not less artificial sort, and the meal proved sufficiently formal. Dr. Van Cleef amiably exhausted his strength in the endeavor to uphold a pretence of conversation; and in this he was seconded by Constance, whose attacks upon the taciturnity of the elders merited a larger reward. March did more than his share, and generously accepting the responsibility, not only of his own entertainment, but of that of the mute eldresses, who sat opposite him, talked vivaciously. But even with the occasional laconic spurs which the failing conversation received from Miss Cynthia, it lagged undeniably, and Dr. Van Cleef at length sought refuge in giving the signal which announced the completion of the meal. The people rose with soft scraping of chairs, and moved slowly toward the parlor.

"It's a failure, daughter," said the Doctor, in depressed undertone, as he passed Constance, lingering by her seat. "I am afraid we can't deny it. It pains me because of Mr. March. I want him to see us at our best."

Constance laughed lightly. "Don't fear for him, father. He is doing capitally. It is the others. Poor father! But it sha'n't be a failure. Let me tell you something." She put up her hand and whispered in his ear, "We will make it succeed;" and she left his side swiftly, looking back to nod brightly to him with a laugh of intelligence. While the guests in the drawing-room, to which they had come, stood looking

doubtfully about them, as if it were occasionally a rather serious responsibility to have charge of one's self, she went silently to the harpsichord, and, seating herself on the long bench before it, touched the yellowed keys softly. The faint, tinny rattle that went on constantly somewhere in the interior mechanism of the instrument was not agreeable, but it did not seem to annoy her, and she rambled thoughtfully into one of the old Moravian melodies dear to them all, raising her voice quietly to accompany its low, glad strains. The company, which had turned toward her at the first note, seated itself gradually, and listened with silent pleasure. She struck into "Coronation" with a loud, firm prelude, and March came over and joined her. With a sympathetic smile, he added his strong untutored tenor to her rich soprano, and at this bold exhibition, a visible embarrassment seized the gathering, and even Dr. Van Cleef did not seem thoroughly comfortable. Nevertheless, one of the younger sisters chimed timidly in the second line, and sang the stanza through with them, while Miss Cynthia uncertainly hummed the air from her lonely seat. Then, as Constance began again :

"Let every nation, every tribe,"

all the eldresses joined her, self-forgettingly. Before the second stanza was done, the bass and tenor voices reinforced them from the other side of the room, and there was a real thrill in the repetition :

"And crown Him Lord of all."

Brother Berg asked for "Brattle Street," and the self-consciousness of the little company forgot to intrude on their joy in the sweet notes of the ancient

hymn. Constance sat feeling musingly for the accompaniment, and looking up at a portrait of her mother, by Gilbert, that lit up the dusky mahogany panel above the harpsichord, while she lifted her voice in that absent consecration, without which singing is as meaningless as drum-beating. Her full soprano rose confidently to the old-fashioned quaverings of the last line :

“With be-e-te--e-r-r hopes be filled,”

and rang and echoed above the others. It was indeed an uncommon voice ; and in her ardor for her father, and the genuine pleasure of use which one gifted with such an organ must feel, she poured it forth in a kind of glory of melody. The others ceased from her one by one, and she presently found herself singing alone :

“ My lifted eye, without a tear,
The gathering storm shall see ;
My steadfast heart shall know no fear—
That he-a-a-rt wi-i-il rest on Thee.”

She sang on unconsciously, her voice rising and falling tenderly to the solemn cadence. As she reached the last line she lifted it in its ultimate power, and dwelling on the quaint quavers, finished in a full-throated burst.

“Why, why aren't you singing?” she cried, turning about on her bench.

“We were listening to you,” said Mr. Keator.

“That's so,” asserted the stoutest and merriest of the elders. “You have a beautiful voice, Miss Van Cleef.” Why not Sister Van Cleef? March wondered. “We hear it at the church, but there's so many others. I don't know as I ever *did* hear you before, so close, as you might say, and I don't suppose the rest of them

have." Constance listened smilingly to these well-intentioned gallantries, comparing them with sad amusement to certain others in her memory. "You know what Scripture says about keeping your light under a bushel," the elder went on, with a kindly twinkle in his eye. "If you've got a silver piece let the light shine on it, I say—and—and call in your friends and neighbors," he ended, with humorous irrelevance.

"That is not the way it is in the Bible, is it, Elder Reidel?" deprecated one of the sisters, meekly.

"Well, I wasn't quoting exactly," asserted the elder. "I mixed up Matthew and Luke a little for illustration—for illustration, you know."

Constance had turned back to the key-board during this discussion, and was murmuringly connecting herself with her memories. An air seemed finally to grow out of this tuneful confusion, and the company finding it familiar, sang through the hymn which was associated with it. A Moravian "Hymn and Tune Book" was produced, and the sisters and brethren, gathering about the harpsichord, asked for their favorites in turn. March, who, after his friendly motion in support of Constance's effort to induce an easier atmosphere, had left the instrument and joined Mr. Keator in a remote corner of the room, remained listening with the minister to the now harmonious and joyous sounds. Occasionally, while one of the sisters ran over the volume from which they were singing, in search of a particular air, the two exchanged some words in undertone; but for the most part they listened earnestly, the minister always with a kind of reverence. Occasionally the singers used the old German words, oftener the English; and if the diction of

neither was irreproachable, the idea which they expressed was at least perfectly clear; and they were sung with a fervor which was in itself a species of devotion, and left nothing to be desired.

The singing of sacred hymns has not been considered a means of entertaining an evening party; but this was not the usual evening party, and Constance exhibited her discernment in choosing it as the most efficacious salt for the thawing of the obdurate ice. Music was not reserved for extraordinary events by the Moravians; it was the companion and brightener of each day; it was summons and farewell, the messenger of grief and happiness, the Church's condolence and congratulation. It was the language of praise, thanksgiving, and worship; of hope, and promise, and prayer. It bid to church, it illumined the ritual, it ended the service, and went home with each brother and sister to dwell with them, as support, counsellor, and friend. Men were born to the glad note of trumpets, they were married in hearing of their jubilant sympathy, their bodies were carried to the grave to the harmony of them, and over the open sepulchre the horns blew the last farewell to the poor clod beneath. Among the company in which we are interested, the singing begot an agreeable sympathy, and when they turned, at length, from the harpsicord and disposed themselves about the apartment, they fell naturally into capitally assorted groups, and began to talk among themselves without self-constraint. Dr. Van Cleef was engaging Mr. Keator in earnest conversation, and Constance went over and let stout Elder Riedel make her what compliments he would. March crossed the room and bravely seated himself on the hair-cloth sofa between the two eldresses,

whose shyness he had measurably conquered at tea. He seemed to succeed admirably with them, for they were presently laughing with him in decent joy. The elders, who were all married, but were not invariably accompanied by their wives, wandered about in their long brown coats, holding discussions with one another upon Church matters, deliberating questions touching the management of the choirs with the sisters, or inquiring the news from the Indian mission settlements. Dr. Van Cleef, who, from time to time cast anxious glances toward March to assure himself that he was not being bored, at last excused himself to Mr. Keator, and went over toward the hair-cloth sofa.

"There are a great many blacks in the West Indies, you say?" one of the prim, pretty sisters was enquiring. "Yes, that is what the missionaries write us. They tell us they are a great trial," she sighed. "They do not seem to take to learning, somehow; and even when they are converted they steal and speak falsely, and the ministers do not seem to be able to make them see the wrong in it. It is a great trial," repeated she, "but I suppose the narrow way is not easy anywhere."

"No," returned the young man, as Dr. Van Cleef approached, "I believe that those who try to pass through it on horseback generally make a failure of it." The sisters looked at each other. The comparison may have seemed questionable.

"Keep your seat, sir, keep your seat," exclaimed Dr. Van Cleef. Then, perceiving the embarrassment of the eldresses, "Mr. March only means, I fancy, that there is no royal road to virtue; we shall agree to that, I think. Yes, yes; we shall all agree to that,"

and he pulled nervously at his stock, while he smiled cheerily down at them.

Meanwhile, Mr. Keator had encountered Constance moving away from her elder. He took her hand without speaking, and looked solicitously in her face. As he continued absently to hold her hand, "You have tired yourself, I am afraid, my—Miss Van Cleef."

She smiled. "You think I am not so strong as the sisters? That's true, but I can play for an hour on the harpsichord." She smiled at him with the conventional smile of conversation.

"No, no; it is not that," said he, slowly dropping her hand—"not that exactly. It is the nervous strain. I have been watching you."

"You are very good," murmured she.

"I don't mean——" He paused a moment. "You make an excellent hostess, my—my dear girl," he said; "but you let the work wear upon you. I have been observing you, as I say. You have seemed anxious and urged. You burn too many candles." He spoke with quiet deliberation, in a marvellously gentle voice, and ended with his winning smile.

Mr. Keator, facing the blazing wood fire, with the light of sympathy in his eyes, might have been thought at the moment a handsome man; but, in the common acceptation, he was as remote as possible from meriting that epithet. Commonly we think of a stalwart figure in using the adjective, and Mr. Keator's, alas! was not a stalwart figure. It seemed to have been loosely put together, like a hastily-made house. The joints were uncertainly knit, and responded to the demands of their owner in the distant, secondary manner of the last wheel in much-gear'd machinery. When he

stood, his frame settled naturally into a relaxed posture, and his sitting was a species of disaster. A painful infirmity, which had made of one foot a mere impotent weight, compelled him to use a crutch ; and he went about leaning his light form on its assured support. It need hardly be added that he was of an exquisitely sensitive nature, and the ingenious reader would guess, if it were left unsaid, that his face, if not a handsome one, was at least a notable one. It was one of those unusual visages that tempt painting. Indeed, it suggested certain paintings. There were the spare, wan features, the high cheek-bones, the irregular lines, the passionless effect of those uncorrupted monks of the early Church whose lineaments cling in rare canvases. It was a sweet and benignant face, and it had, before all, that indefinable aspect which certifies a man to the divine calling. Mr. Keator was little more than thirty-five, and these characteristics were perhaps more conspicuous because of their natural attribution to an older man. He was strikingly tall, and his stooping shoulders were swept by the half-curl of the even, satin locks which fell from his admirable forehead. There was a fine softness, a singular modesty in his presence.

"I—may I have a little talk with you, Miss Van Cleef?" he asked presently, with embarrassment. "They are occupied just now," he went on, indicating the shifting groups ; "our absence will not be noted for a short space. Will you come into the other room with me?" His manner grew more confused, and he finished with an anxious smile. His bearing might have been fancied to refer to something tacitly understood between them. Constance shot a swift, ques-

tioning glance of intelligence at him. "No, no ; not that," he assured her, in response. "You have my promise," said he, with a touch of reproach.

"Very well," returned the girl. "But let us go to the conservatory." Thither accordingly they bent their steps, Constance leading, and Mr. Keator's crutch resounding upon the bare parquet floor of the hall.

"There are seeds there, I think," she reminded him kindly, as he leaned against the edge of one of the beds.

"Ah—ah, excuse me," begged the minister, snatching up his crutch and hobbling down to a seat nearer her. "I was not thinking, I ——" He turned to measure his distance, as is the wont of cripples, before sitting, and did not conclude. He sank upon the bench, and remained looking at her painfully for some moments ; his glance wandered over her in a kind of perplexed compassion, and he seemed several times about to speak, but as often restrained himself. At length he moodily said, "I could wish I might tell you this vicariously. I would much rather another did it."

"If it is painful, pray leave it unsaid, Mr. Keator ; I am sure I shall not like it, and it will only wound you."

"Nay, nay ; it is my duty. I must not shuffle out of it, even if my conscience would suffer it. But I scarcely know how to begin," said he, with a puzzled sigh. "How to say it so that it may not offend you," questioned he with himself. "It may even estrange you from me wholly," cried the minister, looking up in sudden alarm. "Alas, I am selfish. If that comes, it must ; but it is right that I should tell you."

Constance was regarding him with distress. She remembered, afterward, that the full moon was shining

through the panes above them and falling in a kind of aureole upon her companion's head. She knew that it was very warm in the greenhouse, but she could not muster resolution to rise and shut the damper of the little stove. The hum of conversation in the other room came to her vaguely, as through a dream.

"Miss Van Cleef," said the clergyman, suddenly, with quivering lips, "the Elders' Conference felt it its duty at the last session to discuss a matter concerning you."

Constance's self-possession returned instantly. "The Elders' Conference was very rude," she said, quietly.

"Nay ; they had no choice. The regulations of the Church did not leave it within their discretion. I wish I might spare you, my dear girl ; but I must speak plainly. Your association with—with the young man we met to-night is offensive to the Society's rules. I thought you would rather I spoke to you than trouble your father. I have waited, thinking he might go away, and that this would be unnecessary." He paused fearfully, and watched to see how she received the announcement.

Her eyes shone with suppressed passion, but she merely shut her lips and said, coldly, "Well?"

He stared at her an instant, with little comprehension. "I don't understand," he said, at last.

"How does that affect me?"

"Why, you are a member of the Society ; are you not?"

"A member of the Society," repeated Constance, with a compassionate smile, "you know how much, and in what way. When I connected myself with your body to please my father, you can imagine that I

scarcely expected the fact to be used as a weapon against me."

"You put it harshly," said Mr. Keator. "You have not fully established your connection with the Church I know. But you are a probationary member, and there must be restrictions. That is implied in admission to all privileges," he urged gently.

"That may be true; I don't know. But you may be sure that I did not agree to such an implication. Can you fancy, Mr. Keator, that I meant to give up any part of my liberty?"

"I don't know. We supposed so," said he. "You went through the forms."

"The forms!" cried she, with irony. "Yes, I remember; but I didn't make a vow to refrain from conversing with young men."

"Pray don't, Miss Van Cleef."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried the girl, impetuously. "But you must remember my feelings. Mr. March is my father's guest; that, if nothing else——." She paused.

"I am sure you do not believe, my dear girl, that we feel less than your father the obligations of hospitality. All the traditions of our faith bid us give strangers generous welcome."

"And yet you blame him for receiving Mr. March."

"No, no. Any of us would have done as much, though perhaps not under the same conditions. The conditions are peculiar, since you are not in full communion with the Church, nor a member of one of the choirs. But we could not expect your father to take the forethought natural to a brother whose life had been lived under our system. We remember that Dr. Van

Cleef has passed the better part of his days in the world, and no worldly habit of thought could have taught him to look forward to the dangers we now see."

"You mean that one of you would have perceived that Mr. March would stay a long time and become well acquainted with me," said Constance.

"Pray do not take the tone of separateness from us, Constance! You know that we do not hold you or your father wrong in this matter. No one could be more zealous for the Church or more loyal to it than he, and we have liked to believe that you too were in good will toward us, and that you would presently find a more intimate spiritual home among us. I come to you as to one of ourselves, that we may reason together touching a situation which no one has intentionally brought about, but which, without our will—no doubt without yours—is upon our hands. If you will bring yourself to look upon what I have unwillingly said, in that light, I am sure you will see the sophistry of your ideas."

"I beg your pardon," said Constance. "I am unlikely to see it otherwise. I must not let you take away the idea that the elders' wishes will affect my action."

"Oh, I feared that you would take it this way," said he, despairingly.

"How else could I take it? Did you expect me to acquiesce?"

"We do not expect you to abstain altogether from intercourse with him. That would be most grateful to us, but it would not be possible now. All that we request is that your acquaintance with him be—what shall I say?—a little more formal. You see the example it puts before the eyes of the young people's choirs; it is dangerous to them. But it is most dangerous to you. We

must look at the chances fairly. Conceive for a moment the result of your marriage outside the Society."

"Pray be reasonable, Mr. Keator!"

The Moravian looked hurt. "I did not say it was probable," pursued he, with unaltered mildness. "But very few things are impossible. If you will permit me to suppose it, what then of your religious profession?—members of our Church may not marry with those from the world outside, you know. What of your quiet, and, I believe, happy life here with us? What of your father?"

"What, above all, of Mr. Keator?"

It was a cruel blow, and the girl would instantly have given worlds to recall it. His pale visage turned a ghastly white, and he rubbed his hand over his face in a dazed way, while he fumbled for his crutch. As he rose painfully upon this support, "I did not intend that," he said, gasping like a wounded animal. "You know that I—ah, Constance, you must know that I meant you a kindness!"

The infinite gentleness with which he said this; the almost imperceptible reproach in which there was no bitterness, only a hopeless sorrow, touched the girl unspeakably. She could have wept. She rose and forced him to his seat.

"Oh, Mr. Keator, forgive me, forgive me! I knew that I could be wicked and cruel, but I did not know that I could be so wicked and cruel as that. I must have been mad. And you, who are always so good to me; do I know that you only meant kindness? Ah, shall I ever know any thing else? It will always haunt me. *Did* I say it? I should not have believed that I could have said it. It only shows—. Make me a Moravian, Mr.

Keator," she sighed—"a sweet, merciful, patient, genuine Moravian, like yourself. Keep me from such things."

"My dearest girl, if I only might!"

She could not avoid answering his meaning.

"Yes, yes, I know!" said she, hastily. "But you agreed to wait for my answer to that question, you remember."

"I have tried to keep my promise," asserted he, modestly.

"Tried! Ah, Mr. Keator, there might be worse lots than to be your wife!"

The minister blushed in his happiness.

A pause fell. The situation between them seemed to take form and life out of the silence, and stood before them embodied, envisaged; while each clothed it with his own thoughts.

"I think I owe you some recompense, though, for your goodness now," she said, thoughtfully; "I feel just as I said about Mr. March." Mr. Keator sighed. "I cannot change my manner toward him, though I will try to manage that our association, as the elders call it, shall be less public; but for your personal satisfaction I may tell you that there is not the slightest danger of what you speak of, even if he wished it. What I might be led to do by the opposition of the elders is another matter. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Keator?" she asked, anxiously.

What could a man do in such case? If it was a concession, it certainly conceded very little. It seemed to Mr. Keator that it left many things to be said. Nevertheless he was fain to be content; it was perhaps more than he had expected.

"I suppose it should," he said, generously.

"Yes, I think it should," returned Constance; "and when Mr. March is gone, and I have become a good Moravian"—she looked down at her rosy palm—"perhaps then you may come to me for an answer."

She glanced at him with shy dignity, and suddenly left his side. Mr. Keator sat looking in speechless rapture at the point where she had vanished for a long time.

The people were still entertaining themselves with placid enjoyment as Constance re-entered the drawing room. She went directly to her father, who was standing apart for the moment observing the scene with satisfaction, and took his hand silently. He looked up at her through his gold-rimmed spectacles as he patted her palm.

"Where have you been, daughter?" asked Dr. Van Cleef, kindly; "and where have you left Mr. Keator?"

"Mr. Keator is in the conservatory, I think," said she, briefly.

A faint tremor made itself felt in the hand which the doctor's broad palm enclosed, and he gave his daughter a quick, solicitous glance. But he forebore to question her further, and they stood thus, absently regarding their guests for some moments.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN they had all gone, including Mr. Keator, and the servants had arranged the room after Miss Cynthia's severe taste, Constance went about in dreamy pursuance of her habit, modifying the rigor of the chairs' attitudes. It is not to be supposed that her thoughts were wholly engaged with furniture. March, as he bade her "good-night," observed that she went about her work absently, and indeed a host of thoughts occupied her mind. Her decorative touch was no less certain, however, March saw, and the chairs and ornaments of the mantel and tables fell as accurately into the lines of grace as if she had given all of her attention to the matter. Her usual bright "good-night" to him was remote and thoughtful. When he had gone she closed the harpsichord, draped its covering with thoughtful care, and went over to her father, who was sitting before the fire reading a Philadelphia paper, which had reached him by the afternoon stage.

"Good-night, father."

The doctor dropped his paper.

"Good-night, dear," said he, with an emphasis of his invariable caressing tone to her. "Something troubles you," exclaimed he, as she rose after kissing him. "What is it?"

"You are imaginative, father," returned Constance, looking away.

"Not so much as I wish I were. If I had more fancy I should use it in making myself believe that you looked quite happy. But my imagination is not equal to that. Don't tell me if you would rather not, my dear. I don't wish to force your confidence, though I should like to share your trouble."

She glanced at him in hesitation ; then turned her head away once more. Her lips trembled. She was deeply troubled. How willing she would have been to tell him everything ! But she said with a brave smile,

"It is nothing, father dear—nothing. You have a microscope under your eye to-night, that is all."

"Only my spectacles, I think, dearest. I see very well with them, I admit, but I don't think I see things that aren't before them. Still, still—we won't insist. Good-night again."

She stooped and kissed him a second time, and went out, leaving her father staring a little sadly into the fire.

There was much in her heart ; and she was glad of the shelter of her room to see it more closely. Mr. Keator's love, since he had declared it, a year before, had cost her many anxious and thoughtful hours. Her experience had been that of many a girl of imagination and honesty, for the first time asked in marriage by a fine man to whom her heart has not gone spontaneously out. Her intellect consented to Mr. Keator completely. He was good, noble, strong. The list of his just praises was not easily exhaustible. He was indeed in many ways such a man as she had fancied she should wish to marry when the time came ; and this made the dissent of her heart all the harder, especially as it was not an experienced heart and was by no means so clear as she could have wished touching the exact meaning of

what was called love. That she felt some of the symptoms laid down by the books—that is to say, by the novelists—was merely perplexing, not reassuring. Her father had often told her how people imagined the proper symptoms, given a fancy that they were afflicted with a certain disease, and she remembered too, how frequently he had said that people were never ill according to the books.

She wished above all things to be honest with herself and with Mr. Keator ; and at the same time she did not know what to do with her imagination. What if, for instance, she was after all in love with him ? What if this ample admiration and respect for him, this affection for his fine qualities, this genuine liking for the man himself, which would have led her to sacrifice much to do him a service—what if all these in fact meant love ? What standards had she to try love by ? But when these ingenious fancies had had their will upon her, a residuum of certainty was left, upon which she acted. She was sure—or at least she was almost sure—that marriage with Mr. Keator would leave too much unsaid ; it would liquidate only the smallest portion of the debt which she unaggressively believed the world owed her.

Constance certainly expected much at the world's hands—measurable happiness for one thing, and a quiet mind. The action of the elders which Mr. Keator had so gently, so kindly made known to her, was not in the way of fulfilling the world's obligation. She had simply given the matter of her association with March no thought whatever, she said to herself, with some indignation. It was as if she had stooped to pick a casual flower and it had exploded in her face.

No doubt the reproof of the elders, as they had

delivered it, was even worse than Mr. Keator had made it seem. She could not thank the minister too much for making himself the bearer of the message. He had done it out of the purest kindness toward her, knowing that he risked their friendship—certainly the chance of her coming to love him. As she thought of this and the cruel rebuff she had given him, she found herself for the thousandth time on the perilous brink of wonder—wonder whether in her inmost heart she did not in fact love Mr. Keator. She hastily brought out her old arguments and trained them upon this fancy; and she had presently decided once more that she liked him too well to marry him—an assurance which unfortunately could not blind her inward vision to the effectiveness of Mr. Keator as a spectacle of the patient lover.

Standing motionless in thought before her mirror, she could not help reflecting upon what would come of it all; but as she unloosed the golden coil hidden during the day under the society cap, and brushed its long strands with quick motions, she endeavored to think of other things.

Thoughts of Mr. Keator and his warning did not cease to beset her because she dismissed them. They returned upon her quiet hours importunately, and after a day or two she felt that she must share them with some sympathetic spirit. It was unlike her to be looking outside herself for support. She was more and more troubled, however, by the attempt of the elders to hinder her freedom of action. How much further might they go? She wished very much to know. It vitally concerned her future and her peace of mind. She determined to take counsel with one who was near both to the society and to her—one who would be just to her

Church's customs, yet find sympathy for this especial working of them.

Sister Zelda was the only woman in the village to whom Constance could have thought of going on such an errand, and yet it seemed a departure from herself to seek advice, even from her. She reproached herself for her hesitancy about her father's people ; but could she help it ? They were not her people. They were not of her spiritual kindred. They were not of her world. Of course, they were of an infinitely better world. No one felt that more clearly than Constance ; but it was not hers, and she had long ago given up trying to export herself to the solar systems of others, or fancying that any one could be imported into hers. If hers was the brighter sun—perhaps it was not, but she enjoyed its action upon her so much that she ventured to believe it very bright—she felt that the fact implied a duty upon her part toward those who did not live in its rays, and she held herself constantly ready to get out of the light, and to let them bask in its radiance as long as they would. But she knew better than to suppose that they would accept it as a better sun than theirs, or that they could if they would. And upon her part she acknowledged the same incapacity as to other suns.

The daughter of the physician of the settlement, she knew more or less intimately every inhabitant of it. But they did not understand her, nor perhaps wholly trust her in the matter of her attitude respecting the Church, and she, though in sympathy with their general purpose—she was, of course, heartily for any thing that made toward good—was unable to like all the methods by which they sought to accomplish it. For the people themselves she had the kindest regard ; but this consisted

with a certain unfriendliness toward their theory of life. They were good and noble and fine ; they gave her in a way pure delight, and were constantly teaching her to take shame to herself that she was so far below them in all that was finally worth while, but—and she gave the “but ” a feeling stress—she did not know how to sustain long conversations with them. They had not her interests, or rather—for she invariably owned that the fault was hers—she had not theirs.

To all this Sister Zelda was in some degree an exception. Like Constance herself, she had been educated outside the faith, and had memories of a rebellious time when she too observed Moravianism with the critical eye, from without. She had come, however, to look at it in the one fair way of looking at things—from within, or as if one were within—and she found it now so satisfying that she longed to repeat her experience in Constance. They were accustomed to hold many interesting talks together. Since March's coming these talks had been fewer, and it was with a feeling that she had been neglecting her a little that Constance, two days after her conversation with Mr. Keator, took her way to the Widows' Choir House, in which Sister Zelda had her home.

She entered the arched doorway of a large stone building in the midst of a group of like structures, and went along the hallway paved with the bricks which the brethren had made for themselves in the early days of the settlement. Between the lines of doors, on either side the passage, stood the cupboards in which the sisters kept their unluxurious dainties stored. The moons above the two high clocks set in diagonal corners were winking at each other over the big German stove between them. The bricks were extraordinarily clean, and so was all the

wood-work. The balustrade of the staircase, leading above, shone with a glister like silk. There was a conscience in the turn of the coverlids on the prim white beds, which Constance's glance included familiarly as she passed the occasional open doors. On the threshold at the end of the hallway, a cat lay sleeping in the sun ; and looking out beyond, Constance saw that most of the sisters were at work in their garden. The sight reproached her abandonment of her own garden in this precious seed-time ; but Sister Zelda raised her well-made little figure from a bed of sweet-william at the moment, and she remembered her errand. The Moravian caught sight of her visitor at once, and came toward her, smiling.

"Is it me you have come to see, Sister Constance?" She took her hand.

"Do I come to see any one else?"

"Alas ! no. I wish you might."

"Ah, well, that is an old question, Sister Zelda, and I have a new one for you to-day. We shan't need the weeds, shall we?" She pointed, smiling, to the green bunch in the sister's hand.

Sister Zelda threw them down with a restrained laugh, and dusted her hands, gloved in studiously darned lisle thread.

"I am not sorry to leave the weeds ; my back is sore, I may tell you, with stooping." She gave her matronly head a faint shake, and tightened her white cap strings. As the absent minded pinch themselves to remember that they are praying, she reminded herself in this way that she was talking too much of herself ; and she began at once to ask Constance about her welfare.

"I hope you have been well, dear. It is more than a week since we met."

"My body has been briskly, thank you—but my thoughts, Sister Zelda—I've come to talk with you about my thoughts."

The elder woman led her caller into her neat chamber, plainly furnished and uncarpeted, but bright with its own shining cleanliness, and taking color and warmth from its prosperous window garden.

"I am fearful that I know what concerns you," she said, as she seated Constance in the single rocker, and stood behind it holding the knobs at the top tightly, and glancing at the girl's side-face with compassion.

"Come here—before me, won't you, Sister Zelda? I want to speak to you about it—all the more if you know." She half turned her head and gave her companion a furtive upward glance; but the sister kept her hands on the knobs and turned her face away.

"It is hardly so bad as that, Sister Zelda. You need not hesitate to talk of it with me. I am rebellious, of course, but I don't mean to discuss the right of the elders to send such a message to me—it is that you have heard about, I suppose, though I can't fancy how. I am only curious to know how much further they can go."

Sister Zelda took down her nearest hand and put it in Constance's. She did not change her position.

"The Church has its laws. But you need not to vex yourself with them, Constance. Laws are made for those who break them—is not that it?"

"But suppose *I* break them?"

"You will not!" cried her companion.

"I don't know. I shan't imprison myself in them."

"Surely you will heed the elders!" Sister Zelda came before the young girl and looked anxiously down into the calm eyes turned up to her.

"It depends upon what they ask. I don't mean to be unreasonable, but they must not be."

"My dear, my dear! I had hoped you were nearer the Church than that. If you were really one of us, as I have liked to think, you would bear this yoke so easily! I know—you see it all from outside. In that light every rule is a bond. I remember when to me it seemed so. But really, dear, it is a guide—only a guide. Try to think humbly of it in that way."

The mysterious serenity wrought by twenty years' holy living was in the sister's face. The effluence of her mild, sweet presence was like a patient reproach of all pride and self-will and wrong-doing. Her words, Constance felt, added nothing to it; and when the girl glanced at her white cap-strings, she felt a fleeting loathing for the life of which those colorless widow's ribbons made so little, and of which she was making so much.

Yet, she said, as a fresh resentment of the elders' encroachment and her impatience of walking in an alley-way of rules swept over her, "I'm afraid you can't reform me, Sister Zelda. I wasn't bred with the ideas which what you have urged, and—may I say it?—your life, seem to make so grateful. It is a misfortune, since I am to live among those who were reared under them,—especially in my relation to father. I assure you, if I could make those ideas mine by wishing, I should have been a good Moravian long ago, for his sake. What I am anxious to know is very simple. The elders have bidden me use Mr. March less cordially. I do not mean to do it. What will be the result?"

"My child! you will be called before the elders!"

"Please don't think that the consequence will make a difference. I shall do what seems right. I only wish to be prepared."

Sister Zelda left her side and went sadly to the window, where she took up a pair of small scissors which she kept there, and began to cut back a small geranium as if—though it was early Spring—it were to go to the cellar for the Winter. She breathed a heavy sigh.

“You are in love with him.”

Constance started up.

“You will go away with him. We shall lose you.” She took a handkerchief of coarse linen from her pocket, and unfolding it touched it softly to her eyes.

“Zelda !” cried Constance, coming up behind her, “do you think that was like you? Must I be moved by something outside my sense of courtesy and right in a matter like this, if I oppose myself to your system? You know me better than any one else in Judea—except father and Mr. Keator. Do you think I must be in love with my father’s guest to wish to treat him as becomes the head of my father’s household? Ah, Sister Zelda, I can’t believe you do !”

She took her by her shoulders with a caressing motion not common with her. Sister Zelda turned reluctantly, and smiled through her tears into the girl’s eager eyes. She thrust her handkerchief back into the wide-mouthed pocket of her loose skirt.

“You feel that you are acting rightly. I know that. It is not for me to take exception to your motives. What I said : . . . it was my love for you that spoke,” concluded she, hastily, with a tremor in her voice.

“I am sure of that,” exclaimed Constance, contritely, as she led her to the seat she had herself just quitted. She brought a cricket and sat beside her, keeping silence, while Sister Zelda patted her hand and gained control enough of her voice to say,

"I know you do not care enough for yourself, Constance—but for your father's sake, and for mine a bit, if that does not seem like presuming—for sometimes I think you have a mite of liking for Sister Zelda—surely you will try not to offend the elders. Your father loves the Church. It would be a sore cross to him if the Church should be forced to reprove your ways openly."

"They would not dare—!"

"You do not know. We have many old laws. Our people submit themselves. They are in little use."

"If you begin to hold terrors over me, I shall be sinning presently to prove that they are no terrors," laughed Constance, half earnestly.

"Oh, my child, my child!" lamented Sister Zelda, "I wish to lead you ever so gently, and after all it is as if I tried to drive you. I do not understand you. I shall do you no good. Let us talk of somewhat else."

Constance gave a little sigh, and rising, walked over and pretended to examine her companion's plants, while she asked her some questions about them; and soon she remembered that her own plants awaited her out-of-doors, and that she must bring her visit to an end. Sister Zelda let her go wistfully. She did not revert to the topic they had left, though her love and her fears cried for one final word.

Mr. Keator did not again visit the house for several days, but when he came at length Constance's reception of him would not have indicated that he held a place in the foreground of her thoughts. The simple presbyter helplessly recognized past happenings by the mere manner of taking her hand. He glanced shyly at her with an uncertain smile, and hastily took a seat beside her father and began the discussion of some temporal

affairs of the community. Constance continued her talk with March by the window.

After this Mr. Keator was seen as often as usual at Dr. Van Cleef's residence, and in the botanical talks which he constantly held with his host made an effort not to see that Constance avoided tête-à-têtes with him. Botany was a bond of sympathy between the two men, and the firmness of this passionless form of attachment is notorious. Mr. Keator's branch was not Dr. Van Cleef's ; he did not cultivate a large horticultural garden. He observed the habits, the forms, the scheme of life of common plants, and this only required a modest greenhouse. But his love of the science was as lusty as his friend's ; and care and study of his botanical library, and the herbarium stored beneath his bookshelves, occupied the larger portion of the rare hours that he allowed himself to snatch from his profession.

In naming a flower plucked on his woodland walks he often spent several weeks. The addition of a new specimen to the voluminous herbarium, in which he aimed to include the entire range of plant life in the region about, was a keen satisfaction. He found pleasure in watching the large collection grow larger, in smoothing the regular green outlines of a freshly found plant on its background of clear white paper, in carefully pressing it between the sheets of pasteboard, in tracing its genus, species, and the like, on the cover in his small, perfect hand. The close-set shelves, arranged as a depository for these precious volumes, ran about the four sides of his library beneath the books ; and the neat, thin quartos, between whose sides the fading plants slept, seemed to have no quarrel with any but the sourdest of the theologians above. "We are part of nature,"

they might have been fancied to say ; " if you also are, very well ! If not, so much the worse for you."

Into this library March found himself often straying, as his acquaintance with its owner ripened. The minister was an Englishman, and it chanced that, his mother being of German birth, part of his education had been gained at Heidelberg. The early years of his ministry had been passed in the mother country, and he had been sent to America because of his command of the two languages needful in this field—German and English ; an Englishman who spoke excellent German being thought, on the whole, as well adapted to the work as a German who knew no English. March had many agreeable reminiscent talks with him about England and Heidelberg. They had not been at Heidelberg together, but English-speaking students were rarer at the German university at that time than now, and a common experience of the kind was a more valid reason for fellowship than it might now be regarded.

Mr. Keator impressed March as a singularly fine-fibred and charming spirit. In some ways he was thoroughly unlike the people over whom he had been set. His infirmity, which hindered him in no good work, and as to which he was at once touchingly intelligent and finely unconscious, was in itself a commendation to liking. For the clergyman's part, he was extremely courteous to the young man. He invited him to make use of his library, which was rich in certain volumes that March found useful in his investigations regarding the country he had come to explore. The young man when he came was made unaffectedly welcome ; if Mr. Keator was at work, the minister merely gave him his cordial greeting and went on ; and when,

as occasionally happened, he came in and found March engaged, he left him to his studies.

A feeling of good comradeship rose between them, to which the members of the family of March's entertainer were singularly unrelated. In the conversations of the two they were seldom mentioned. Discussing the larger subjects in rambling, unheated fashion, March received a series of mild shocks in becoming acquainted with certain opinions of his interlocutor which went perilously near the root of things. Some of these did not appear, at first thought, part of the natural equipment of a Moravian presbyter, and they were at least astonishing as specimens of the mental furniture of a gentle spirit. But nearer acquaintance reconciled many things, and March presently perceived that the ideas which had seemed idiosyncrasies were in fact the necessary corollaries of the simple faith by which he lived. Mr. Keator was merely that being dear to the angels, if in little repute among mortals, a perfectly impractical man. His clear vision distinguished Right through whatever fog of Wrong with a certainty which rendered him impatient of the means for lifting the fog. That noble dream of binding the thousand differing sects in one vast Church was, for instance, very dear to him. He looked forward to the abolition of slavery the world over, and there would certainly have been a tremendous rattling of shackles if he had been born, let us say, the Czar of Russia.

Fortunately his theories led him to no aggressive acts. As a Moravian he was opposed to wars, and March was confident that he would grieve for the accomplishment of the fondest of his large-hearted wishes if achieved by force of arms. He might indeed head a missionary army ; but its methods would be unsanguinary.

March saw much of Mr. Keator, but he did not see less of Constance ; and once or twice, as they came into the house after a morning spent in the garden or upon a long drive, it occurred to him that these were the conditions under which wooings went on. It did not follow that he should arraign himself for this. He was, for the most part, not a man of anxious scrutinies, and the ring of sentiment was the last which he was likely to test over-curiously. He felt no obligation to ask himself whether he was in love with the girl who caused him to pass so many agreeable hours.

CHAPTER V.

THE shadow of Winter which had lingered on the sulky clouds slowly passed at the sun's bright nods, and the reluctant foliage by imperceptible motions dressed the trees and shrubs. But toward the middle of April came one perfect day. The sun gallantly made satisfaction for all past failings, and shone upon the sleeping earth as if it were never to shine again. A new fragrance rose from the steaming soil. Out in the fields the broad hats of the brethren again knew their proper use as shades, and as they followed the plough, rolling up the fat soil in long moist lips, their rejoicing chorales came softened to the ear of the settlement through the sunlit air. The sleek oxen, pausing at the end of the furrows, raised their mild eyes and lowed with sturdy liking toward the wide blue. In the orchards the magic warmth touched the tardy buds and straightway they were blossoms, while any one could see the leaves unfolding to the clear, sweet air. The slandered northern Spring moves slowly; she hangs shyly back as any maiden should, she coquets with the earth, she pouts, she is full of whimsey; but when she comes she comes royally.

Dr. Van Cleef's garden leaped forward under the amiable impulse. The lilac bushes under the side windows, which had only waited a little encouragement, flowered within the day, and the jonquils took heart and

held up their heads with a consciousness of propriety in their presence under such a sky. From every quarter of the garden rose a cloud of perfume which the sense presently discriminated as the incomparable odor of the violet. The breeze brought from the fields the nameless earth smell, mingled with the faint scent of apple-blossoms. Every shrub felt the indubitable Spring in its veins and did honor to it. The rose-buds swelled joyfully. Dr. Van Cleef bade adieu to solicitude touching late frosts, and superintended the transplanting of the sheltered greenhouse blossoms to open beds. There was a new brightness in the fine garden when the flaming geraniums, the fuchsias, the begonias, and the rest, once more rose from their native soil and saluted the weather. The doctor made few professional visits, but went about with a happy smile, carrying a small pair of pruning shears, with which he corrected from time to time impertinent growths. The robins and bobolinks flew across his path, and, perching confidently on the neighboring shrubs, chirped their inebriate glee in the old man's face.

The days which followed seemed less admirable only because less novel. One ceased to think of the weather, as there was clearly nothing left to wish, and from such suave skies only an obstinate cynic could have expected any thing but the most lady-like behavior. It was plain, not only that the Spring had come, but that she had been confirmed in her urbanity and had nothing to retract. The school boys, whom March had heard at intervals, in colder weather, clamoring mildly on their play-ground, let loose their voices now in the sunshine with a heartiness quite without propriety, but which the masters, sympathizing perhaps with their joy, did not appear to feel

it their duty to repress. Giant kites floated in battalions, isolated to the eye from earth and clouds, and the long street became the field of critical skirmishes at Prisoner's Base. In the late afternoons these merry youngsters, whom no error of costume could age, came from the woods laden with sassafras and sweet flag and other objects of boyish search, chanting in raucous soprano the hymns of their choir. The older girls, too, as Easter approached, might be seen, clad in the simple dress and modest cap, returning to the settlement with baskets of trailing arbutus, hepatica and dog tooth violets for the decoration of their choir houses and the great congregation house ; and as their full, sweet voices rose in their virginal chants, beseeching the Bridegroom of the Church to grant them purity of heart and that peace which passeth all understanding, March felt, as he listened from the green depths of the garden, or sometimes stood aside on the street to let them pass, that the prayer was needless. Certainly here was an exquisitely pure and lofty faith, one in which one might live calmly and die strongly.

In this friendly view he was much strengthened by acquaintance with certain of the brethren. March found himself liking them greatly, and in much the same way and for the same reasons that he liked men in the world. Indeed it was only in some little tricks of speech and dress that they enforced the difference, and though they could not entirely cloak in their conversation the broad charity, the serene faith, the intimate walk with God, which were the essentials of their creed, they never insisted upon them, and one learned from long acquaintance only, the perfect manliness, the noble simplicity of their lives. They were not only admirable Christians ;

they were after their lights—as March told himself with a perception of the humor of the phrase as applied to them, yet with a sense of its absolute truth—chivalrous gentlemen. In other words, they met him in a measure on his own ground ; they spoke the universal language of courtesy. It is true that they used it a little shyly—not as an unfamiliar tongue, but as if with a fear that their accent might not in every respect correspond to his—but March found springing up between them and him, a kind of fraternity which was altogether pleasant.

“ You will be one of us mayhap yet, Brother March,” ventured one of the younger brethren to him, as they came out of the church together one afternoon. “ You admire our faith. You say you like the life. We shall look to see you join us some day.”

The young man smiled that waiting smile with which the deaf sometimes deprecate the answer they may fail to hear.

“ It is not likely, I fear, Conrad. The old Adam is a little strong in me still. You could hardly receive me consistently, and I certainly couldn’t come to you with any kind of conscience,” smiled March. “ Besides, the world calls me yet. Moravianism is not for the young, I’m afraid, Conrad. When I’m older, I can’t say. I might be glad of such a rescue from the world’s troubles as you offer.”

“ That is what they all tell us,” returned Conrad Hied, with a deaf man’s precise speech. “ But we can hardly be expected to see it so. Moravianism is for every one ; that is what we say.”

“ Ah, it is not for me ! ”

“ Nay, you may feel some time that it is. But we do not seek converts—we wish no one who does not feel a

call. If you should ever feel the call, Brother March," pursued he, with his kindly smile, "we are here."

March was unconscious how importantly his association with Constance affected her. He could scarcely imagine that it touched her relation to the Church; and even the Moravians who knew him best were loth to tell him. Of Mr. Keator's warning to her none but the elders and the eldresses were definitely informed, but the ungossiping, charitable community had its thoughts; and its members were of course perfectly acquainted with the usual discipline in such cases, though it was seldom used.

In what may consist the indefinable quality of heartiness of manner, the lack of which pains us in friends and sets us agate with acquaintances, is not so clear as the fact of its presence or absence. As to that no one can mistake. It is merely in the air, but the sense of it reaches us without putting it to the trouble, like carbonic acid gas, of giving us a headache; and yet we are usually glad to wait until the headache proves us right. March began to fancy that he felt the want of this vital constituent of breathable social air. But though he was confident that something was missing from the former cordial bearing toward him of the people of the settlement, the wanting thing was so impalpable that he was willing to believe he might be wrong, and he said to himself carelessly that at all events, if it existed, it might come to him, for he had no idea of going to it. If Dr. Van Cleef, whose long absence from his people had given him time to grow forgetful about their customs—perhaps even unconsciously careless in pursuance of the strict letter of them—experienced any thing of the same sort, it did not visibly trouble him; and he would certainly

have been at a loss to find reason for it, since knowledge of the proceedings of the elders had been kept from him by Mr. Keator's wish.

Constance would have been annoyed if she had observed that March was less well seen in the community whose members he had appeared to like so well ; yet, as she would not have treated him differently to win the good-will of ten times the number of persons in Judea for herself, she would not have done more to gain it for him. She was assured that her course was right—not for Eugenia or Florence or Philomena, perhaps, but distinctly right for Constance ; and nothing—save possibly her father's wish—could have caused her to move from it. It was certainly a bitter trial of her resolution when, within a week of her visit to Sister Zelda, she was called quietly before several of the elders and gently questioned and admonished. She was only a girl, and though it was all done with as much care for her feelings as was consistent with their duty, it was the cruelest ordeal through which she had ever passed. She remembered it as a nightmare ; and she never met afterward one of the elders who had put to her in a kindly voice what she felt to be odious questions, without a shudder. Her arraignment had probed her heart, but she remembered proudly that they had not been suffered to know that. For she had not answered their questions, and the tremor had lain silent in her throat, not shaming her in her voice.

The occurrence did not cause her to change her course ; and this was not altogether because the spirit of combative pride which spurs us all at times to do foolish things, out of mere opposition, was aroused. She bore herself toward March as she had borne herself prior to Mr. Keator's warning and the elders' admonition,

because if it was right to treat him with what seemed to her the courtesy due her father's guest then, it was not less right now. She had promised Mr. Keator, and she endeavored to make their association as little public as possible ; but save for this concession she kept calmly on her way—not obstinately ; she hoped not vaingloriously or in self-will.

And March did not know.

He had begun to think that he must go. Lincoln wrote that he was unexpectedly detained by business, and was not to be looked for within the week ; but March not unwillingly permitted one thing and another to detain him for a day or two, and presently Dr. Van Cleef fell ill. Dr. Glick, who took his senior's place with his patients and consulted with him upon his own treatment, seemed not to think it a serious matter. Dr. Van Cleef had suffered other such attacks, though possibly none so severe. It would, nevertheless, be discourteous to leave, and March remained, assisting as he might. Constance's acquaintance with these assaults was of long standing, and she had learned the wisdom of that instructed sympathy which is content to leave its object largely to the operation of quiet and proper medicines. She was apparently not alarmed. March was, therefore, offered freer rather than more limited opportunities of seeing her, and he improved them with proper gallantry. Her gardening, an employment which occupied many of her hours at this season, he usually found time to be present at.

“What is it to-day?” enquired he, as Constance emerged from the tool-house at the lower end of the garden on a certain afternoon. She was tying on an ample apron, and carried a trowel in her hand.

"Roses. The lesson this afternoon will be in transplanting," said she, smiling, as she gave the strings of the apron a smart tug.

"It's very good of you to let me be present at the demonstration."

"That is not the Moravian idea," returned Constance, cutting with her trowel an opening in the soil for a rose.

"I beg your pardon!"

"I say that is not the Moravian way of looking at it," repeated Constance, smoothing the earth thoughtfully about her plant. Her manner toward March, as has been said, was not changed. Having imagined a part, she was capable of supporting it to the ultimate point of *vraisemblance*, and she had determined, with a generous impulse of reparation for the affront, which Mr. March could not know, that he should guess nothing of it from her bearing. Upon her conversation, however, as apart from her manner, she could not always keep absolute watch, and these words had slipped from her unawares.

"I don't know," said March, at length. "You have an intricate system, though your fundamental theory is so simple. But I don't believe the Moravian notion of courtesy differs greatly from the generally received one, does it?"

"I can't tell you. Yes—it does in some ways."

"What do you mean?"

She glanced hesitatingly at him. "Why, it's not in what one would call courtesy, exactly, that they differ—certainly they would not name it so. It is a part of their system—part of their theory, as you call it."

"You say they?"

"They? What do you mean, Mr. March?"

"You speak as if they were somehow separate. You

are one of them, are you not? Surely you profess their faith?"

"I!" cried Constance, turning upon her trowel as she set it in the path. "I scarcely understand. I a Moravian."

"Certainly."

She bent her lustrous eyes upon him. "You don't think *me* a Moravian, Mr. March?"

"Surely."

"Why, no!" exclaimed she, with a little wondering smile, rising with the trowel in her hand. "No! How could you think——?"

His glance guided her to her costume. "Ah! my dress! Of course. How stupid of me! But you didn't suppose that means any thing." March confessed to this innocence. "Why that—that I wear for my father," she told him seriously.

"But he—surely he is a member of their Church?"

"Of course! You didn't imagine?—Oh, you are very badly tangled, Mr. March."

"I shall be glad if you will unravel me," said he.

"Why, let me tell you," began the girl, seating herself on the stout monument of a recently felled tree, and balancing the point of the trowel on her knee. She recited the facts of her father's life as March already knew them from Lincoln.

"My father married in New York, and out of his faith, of course. My mother was not a Moravian," concluded she.

"But you? . . . Pardon me!"

"Ah, you must tell me," cried the girl, sadly.

"I fear I am prejudiced."

"Perhaps," she answered, absently. Then continuing

"When my mother was dying she begged father to come back here; she knew that his future happiness must be among his own people. And so it has been. Considering the extent of his offense, in their view, they received him—they received us, very kindly. My father purchased this place, and you see his life. About their little rules and observances he is more liberal, I think, for having been of the world so long; but, in the main, Mr. Keator, himself, is not a more zealous Moravian. He loves the Church, though he broke away from it in his youth for a broader field, and in his old age the life here has become very dear to him. He is not expected to practice outside the settlement, you know; but as he is not allowed to receive fees, they often call upon him from the country about, and he always goes. He is very happy in it all. At least—why, it has pained him, of course, that I am not of his faith."

"But outwardly——?"

"I wear the dress, as you say," returned she, with a deeper melancholy, possibly, than she knew, "and sometimes I go to their church. I am even enrolled, I believe, as a probationary member of the congregation," continued she, with apathy. "But my heart is not in it. I have tried, oh, I have tried!" she exclaimed, with sudden energy, and tears came into her eyes. "But I can't, I can't. Every thing in me revolts against it!"

"It seems a very pure and beautiful faith," deprecated March.

"Oh, I know that so well!" cried Constance, wearily. "I have told myself that very often. It is a capital refuge, is it not? But I don't want a refuge. I want to live! I should like to see, to do, to be!" exclaimed she, rapturously. "I want to plunge into the midst of

things, not to shelter myself from them. Some time I might find this life the sweetest thing in the world. But now—ah! I long for experience!” breathed the girl, with sparkling eyes.

The pretty white coif looked hopelessly irrelevant; the plain gray gown silently protested against these audacious sentiments.

“Experience sometimes bruises. It is often cruel,” ventured her companion.

“Oh, Mr. March, do you say that to the young soldier? Do you talk to him of wounds? Do you fancy he cares for them? He looks forward to action, to glory. He does not think of death,” pursued she, with sympathetic scorn.

“I don’t know. If he is wise, he looks over the ground, he takes things into consideration.”

Constance glanced at him speculatively.

“You don’t believe that, Mr. March. I am sure you don’t!”

“But if it is true!”

“Then I don’t want to be wise. I want to be delightfully foolish,” averred she, with joyous emphasis. “One can’t look forward to a lifetime of this.” She glanced with dislike at her dress and indicated the line of grotesque roofs just visible above the shrubbery. “One’s vow might bind one to verbal agreement that this village is the world; but it’s not. One’s mind has its own geography, and even vows can’t revise it.”

She tapped her trowel thoughtfully upon the stump.

“Of course, I sympathize with you,” said March, earnestly. “But you must see, that though you may be in the right, all the conditions conspire to put you in the wrong.”

"Oh, you don't like to aid and abet rebellion!" cried she. "It's quite right; I feel so myself. I am on the side of submission, however I may seem to contradict it. I deplore my ideas. I feel with regret that I am a rebel, and should like to suppress my insurrection. I am constantly leading out armies against it; but thus far the rebel has the best of it. He appears to carry the stronger guns."

"I think I should run up a flag of truce and hold a parley," laughed March.

"I've tried that, but he has no respect for the laws of war. He keeps on firing. Seriously, Mr. March, you understand my situation. I would not leave my father, of course, if a hundred gates stood open to the world I long for. Yet I can not help wishing. We left New York, you see, just as I began to go out a little. If I had been brought here as a child I should have known nothing else, and might have been content. But I have had sight of the promised land, and I can not tell you how I wish to go down into it." She paused with a sad smile. "It seems wicked to be talking in this way. Father is so good; and we should be so very happy if this wretched question of my faith and intention could be put away from between us. He thinks of it constantly, I know, though he will not urge me. But his very silence is a reproach, and standing before the two paths, I have drifted into one a little way from sheer remorse and sorrow for his feeling."

"Why not go on in it? It won't run directly to the Elysian fields, I'm afraid, but—but I am presuming—"

"Oh, no. But you haven't lived for a long time among these people, as I have. I remember that. It is

not strange that it seems so fine a thing to you. I thought so at first. But nothing could be so perfect as Moravianism appears. It is for the old." March remembered, self-accusingly, what he had said to Conrad. "It has the quality of every faith that separates itself and asks renunciation of the world. It is sweetest to the world's victims, to the world's failures. You see, I am neither yet, Mr. March," said she, smiling with mournful humor.

"You would like an opportunity to be?"

"I don't say that," she answered, slowly; but I should like freedom to take the world as it comes to others. I can't accept the protection from it that these good people—they are very good, Mr. March; don't think I am blind to that—could offer me. That is their compensation; they have given up the world, but the world has surrendered its claim. They have escaped its pains by renouncing its joys. That is very well; I only say that for me the reward is not high enough. I am not sure that, even if I could make up my mind to turn my back upon life, as you advise, I should be able to conquer my feeling about certain things. Oh, you don't know, Mr. March! Think of the absurdity of separating the sexes in a community which does not forbid marriage. You can't fancy the stringency of their rules."

"Perhaps not," said he, respectfully.

"You know that the young men and women seldom encounter; but can you imagine how all intercourse, even the innocent play of children, is abolished? Why, Mr. March, if I were half as good a Moravian as you thought me, do you suppose I could sit here and talk with you?"

"I—why March started and flushed. "I don't know. Why not?"

"Ah, that you must ask the spirit of the master-mind of the Church—Count Zinzendorf," cried she, hastily, with her eyes fixed on the tip of her boot.

She took up the trowel which she had laid by her side and began to play with it uneasily. She was regretting her impulsive question.

March stared at her, bewildered.

"I scarcely understand, Miss Van Cleef. Is this what you meant when you said——? Have I been transgressing? Is there——? Surely there can be no rule of the settlement which prohibits innocent conversation."

Constance was pulling a rose to pieces with down-cast eyes. She made it an elaborate operation, surveying each petal critically before drawing it from the calyx, as if it might after all be the particular petal which ought not to be plucked. She did not look up as she answered, at length,

"In—in certain cases."

She cast away the naked calyx impatiently, and strove to raise her eyes and confront his boldly, but a modest seizure defeated this, and she hurriedly fixed her glance on the hands she folded in her lap.

"I don't see, Miss Van Cleef," cried March, in a mystery. "I won't see. I should be afraid to believe what you seem to say. If—— But it is impossible, it is monstrous. Pray tell me what you mean," he begged, more calmly. "You can certainly make it plain with a word. Say that word, Miss Van Cleef. There can be no offense; yet I must ask you to—to assure me that there is none." He laughed painfully. "This is torturing. Speak! Say that I am a dastard, if you will. There

will be others to say it, if it is true. I may better hear it from you."

"You must go to the others, Mr. March," answered she, looking up at him with a brave smile. "You misconstrue ; you misunderstand," she told him, with sad calm. "It is natural, but I can't explain," she went on, drearily. "I can tell you that you have done nothing unworthy of yourself. But I can not say anything to make it clear. It is too bad to have vexed you. I ought not to have spoken."

She ceased quietly, with a note of contrition, and March regarded her for a moment, stupefied.

"That is very well, Miss Van Cleef," he said, rousing himself at length. "I appreciate your feeling. But you can hardly expect me to remain satisfied with no more explanation." He rose suddenly. "I am going in search of information," he announced.

"I wish you wouldn't."

"I won't if you ask me not," he said, quickly.

She observed him questioningly for an instant, and breathed a heavy sigh. Then she dropped her trowel and turned from him on the stump with the glitter of tears in her eyes.

"Pray, go !" she cried, brokenly.

March glanced at her with compassion, and seemed about to speak. But he abruptly turned from her and went up the garden path with swift steps.

CHAPTER VI.

MARCH went out into the street silently basking in the afternoon sun, and, after a moment's hesitation, toward the church and the choir houses. They stood massively grouped at the end of the street with something the appearance of a castle that had not attained its full stature ; though turrets and flying buttresses, gargoyles and other proper architectural adornments were abundantly distributed, and, so far as they went, were genuine. The stone pile faced North and West, and half enclosed a species of court, in which was built a graceful little chapel, used as a temporary resting-place for the dead while awaiting burial in the beautiful plot beyond.

March's intention seemed to volatilize in the sunlight, for, having reached Mr. Keator's door, he surveyed it thoughtfully for a moment, and turning quickly away, walked back toward the paved approach to the court which he had just passed. It was cool in the dense shadow of the towering masonry as he went up the walk at the rear of the choir houses, but out in the cemetery the low graves lay bright in the April warmth.

The burial plot was surrounded by a paling painted a dazzling white. Ordinarily the gate was open, but March found it securely padlocked. There were other entrances, one of which was doubtless unfastened, but the young man's mood at the moment was not patient of hindrances, and, grasping two pickets firmly, he lifted himself over with an agile impulse. It was an absurd

manner of entering a graveyard, he felt ; but the touch of recklessness in the act was a vague relief to him. He went swiftly along one of the paths, kicking restlessly at the occasional twigs which had escaped the vigilant rakes of the brethren.

The enclosure was called a cemetery, and this was certainly its use, but the casual glance would have supposed it a scrupulously kept park. The evidences of its real character were neither profuse nor obtrusive, and one's feeling in alighting upon them would have been rather a surprised pleasure than the unreasoning chill that commonly shames one in the presence of like emblems. The slabs of slate lay above the graves, instead of standing to proclaim their presence, and the inscriptions upon them were meagre. Dense growths of thyme all but hid these modest records of good lives ; but nothing else was allowed to grow densely. The trees and shrubs were lopped back, and the sunshine was everywhere. The low paling did not emphasize the limits of the ground. There is no reason to suppose that there was a willow in the enclosure ; and one trusted the affirmation that the birds gathered more thickly here than elsewhere was something better than an engaging legend. In this pretty park much of the village leisure was spent. The housewives passed their infrequent vacant hours knitting and gossiping upon the numerous benches. They brought their children too, and let them play in the paths. No one who came to the place thought it needful to bring a gloomy mood with him ; and this was both because the enclosure was so little like a burial plot, and because the Moravians harbor no mean and craven thought of death. Death to them is in the nature of a joyful culmination of years of placid preparing—yet

not as an escape from life, which to their sense is a felicitous and grateful season, a long opportunity of gladness.

March found the cemetery deserted. He seated himself on one of the benches and remained for some time gazing rather vengefully into vacancy. It was obvious that he had been guilty of an offence, an indiscretion, a mistake—what one would ; but the nature of it was by no means so clear. Whatever its character, it was unfortunately certain that it touched Miss Van Cleef. He reflected that he might have gone away unconsciously stained by it ; and he was properly grateful for the accident which had kept him. There were doubtless numerous persons who might resolve his difficulty ; indeed that might prove the least tolerable feature of his position. Possibly the very boys held the key ; all the society might have been looking on at his stupidity—wondering, waiting for him to learn his error. March felt like a blind man who has been suffered to walk steadily on toward an obstruction without warning from the gaping bystanders. He stared aimlessly at a young flowering shrub before him, which would be a gay point of color later, but now was only beginning to feel the amiable Spring in its juices, and doubtfully decorating itself with green, and wished he knew some one who could and would tell him all he wanted to know.

A figure entered at one of the gates and passed spectrally before his preoccupied vision. As he went by, on a path beyond, March recognized him. He called his name, and Conrad Hied, turning with his ready smile, perceived him, and picking his way between the graves came over and stood before him.

“ You have been drawn here, also, Brother March ?

We all love the cemetery, but we would suppose you might find it lonely. Some do not have our thoughts of death, you know," apologized the young brother.

"Conrad," said March, irrelevantly, "I want to ask you something; or rather," smiled he, self-convictingly, "I want to know something which I don't greatly want to ask you."

"It will be very pleasing——"

"Sit down with me for a moment, Conrad. Tell me plainly——" said he, sitting erect and turning toward him on the bench, "I know you hedge the relations of your brethren and sisters in a general way—but do you prohibit all intercourse? frankly, do you forbid conversation between them?"

Conrad blushed painfully.

"Not—not exactly as you may say *forbid*—we do not encourage it."

"If you, as a postulant—an intending priest of your Church—were to see an unmarried brother and sister pause in the street below there to speak to each other, what would you think your duty?"

"I do not know," answered Conrad, doubtfully. "You put hard questions."

"Oh, well, I don't look for soft answers, Conrad. I am merely engaged in a little hunt for truth. Let me make it easier for you:—suppose you saw them repeat such an action?"

"I should feel it right to speak to Mr. Keator of it," replied the young man.

"The rule seems clear, at all events," said March.

"It is not what you could call a rule—not that exactly," returned Conrad, hastening his slow speech; "it is a custom."

"With the force of a rule."

"Rule?" inquired Conrad, straining to hear. "We have not any rule but love," said he, quaintly.

"One would say rather that you have every rule but love."

Conrad scrutinized his companion's face in distress.

"I mean nothing to the discredit of your people," said March. "I intend to say that your customs do not encourage marriage."

"Oh!" exclaimed Conrad, his round, deep-set eyes brightening with comprehension. "But we wish to encourage marriage."

"By keeping a high wall between your men and women?"

"Is it possible that you do not know, Brother March?"

"What?"

"Our mode of forming what the world calls 'engagements.'"

"I think I should like to know, Conrad," said March, with a note of deeper seriousness in his voice; and rising nervously, he stood in the gravel path confronting the young brother.

"Our marriages are made by lot," said Conrad, looking up at him anxiously from his lower height. "I thought you knew that."

"By *lot*? Do you mean—? Why, what *do* you mean, Conrad?" cried March, stupidly.

Conrad put his hand to his ear.

"Lot? Yes, lot. It seems as if it was quite simple to us. We have known it so long, perhaps. When one of the brethren wishes to marry, the Eldress of the Single Sisters' Choir presents a list to the Conference. The lot tells us which sister our Lord wills to be his wife; or

if the brother should feel a preference the lot is first tried for the sister that he names. That is all."

"That is a great deal," commented March, briefly.

"Yes, it seems strange to you, Brother March, I suppose," said Conrad, regarding him with a questioning smile. "It is very dear to us—to most of us. Sometimes the young people find it hard ; but in the end they most always bear the yoke without much complaint. It is their training, I should guess. We are taught to submit ourselves from the first, and it comes easy after awhile. If their wishes stand in the way of our Saviour's will, they generally feel it a privilege to subdue them. They are not forced to, of course, but they feel it a call—a direct call, as you might say ; and they mostly obey."

"But the two do not know each other. It is like a royal marriage or a Turkish marriage."

"That may be ; I do not know about them. But the folks concerned belong to the same society ; they do not differ much in their feelings. As to their knowing each other, it is true that we can not countenance that ; but I have heard," continued Conrad, quizzically, "that even in the world folks mostly do not know those they marry. They know their husks, as you might say. And our brethren and sisters know that ; they see each other in church. But summering and wintering, as the saying is : that is the only sure test."

Conrad rose and stood beside his companion with his instant smile.

"They tell us so," returned March, glancing meditatively at the involved melody of the name of an Indian convert inscribed on a stone behind the bench.

He took Conrad's arm and they walked together down the path.

"I suppose you know that you have surprised me, Conrad," he said, "but you can't fancy how much. I never heard of any thing of the kind before. I—I've not been counting upon it. It opens long vistas of reflection. I've scarcely entered them yet. I could not tell you all I think."

"You must not think any thing unpleasant of us, Brother March."

"You may be sure that I shall not."

"We do not usually speak of these things to the people who come to us from outside. They do not see them as we do. Their eyes look another way. I suppose most eyes look different ways; we try to make allowances for that. But I thought I ought to tell you."

"Why me, Conrad?"

The young Moravian gave him the vacant look of the deaf.

"Why tell me more than another?" repeated March.

"You? Oh—I do not know. You was asking, was you not?"

"I asked about your customs among the unmarried?"

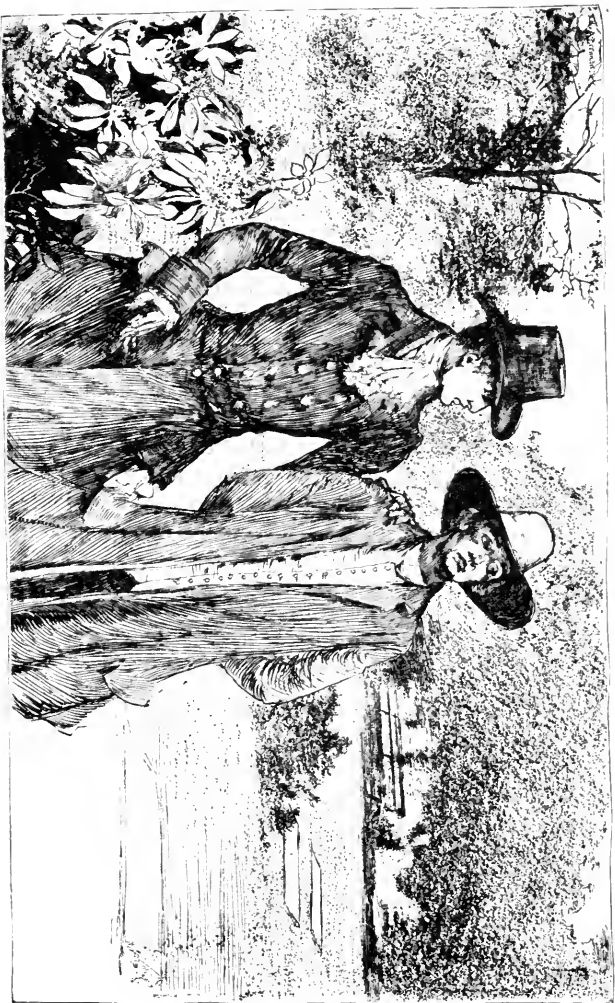
"Well, that was it. You seemed interested."

"I was. It explains a great deal."

"Yes, I suppose. I felt it was right to make it clear to you. You have always looked at us friendly, as you might say. You would never have us in derision like some. I thought you ought to know," he repeated, inconclusively, and turned his troubled face away.

March stopped short in the path, and taking his companion's shoulder, brought him gently to face him.

"Conrad, you mean more."



“Conrad, you mean more!”

The brother bowed his flaxen head, and the crimson dyed his fair German skin.

“Do not, Brother March.”

“I must. I want the truth now. You have all stood by and let me go on making a fool of myself before you too long. I don’t know what I’ve done. I’m not conscious of any wrong. But if there is one, let me know, that I may remedy it, or at least meet you fairly. This blundering in the dark is intolerable. Don’t think that keeping the light from me is a charity; it’s a cruelty. You have the light, Conrad. Show it me.”

“I would rather not, Brother March.”

“Then there *is* something. You admit that.”

“N—no, not exactly. There is nothing that you are wrong in. I meant to tell you!” cried Conrad, in distress. “That is true. But I can not now. Indeed, I ask your pardon, Brother March, for not having been more fair with you, as you might say. I did almost deceive you, I suppose. I can not see as it is much better just not to tell the truth than to speak falsely. But I could not tell you; I did not know how you would take it, and anyway, it was not for you to trouble about it.”

“Not for me? I don’t understand. For whom, then?”

“Oh, I must not say.”

March turned impatiently and walked on.

“You are right, Conrad. You are not fair.”

Conrad was sadly silent. He took off his broad hat and mopped his forehead. They walked on for a moment without speaking. As they went into one of the narrow, tributary paths, the blare of trumpets smote the air, and a funeral concourse appeared at the further end of the avenue next them. March remembered he had

heard the band's harmonious requiem for a death, from the church tower, a day or two before. A young girl was apparently to be buried, for, behind the musicians, eight maidens, preceded by the Eldress of their Choir, walked beside the bier. Their white raiment, which was not less the costume of the mourners behind, was delicately interpretative of the current sense of the event. Even the usual colored ribbon which fastened the cap was displaced, in the case of those most directly interested, by a tie of white.

The two young men drew aside and watched the solemn procession. Arrived at the grave, the company separated as usual ; the men taking their stand upon one side, the women remaining upon the other. The trumpets ceased as the bearers deposited the pall by the grave, and a sweet soprano raised her voice in a hymn which all presently joined in singing. In the trees above, the robins maintained their own chirruping chorus, and one of them which had been running along near the open pit, dipping noisily at the humid earth, perched confidently upon the coffin, which stood a little removed from the gathering, and twittering for an instant in the face of the mourners, swept on a fresh flight through the balmy morning air. March touched Conrad's arm, and, by a mutual impulse, they withdrew silently by the path up which they had come, while the sad, final words, in Mr. Keator's gentle voice, followed them through the stillness. Both were moved by the incident ; in its light their colloquy cheapened and faded, so that recurrence to the subject of it seemed a kind of impropriety.

As they paused outside the gate furthest from the church, "Are you going to the *Gemein Haus* ?" asked Conrad.

"I don't know. It's Easter-even, isn't it? Yes."

"Do not."

"What?"

"Do not," repeated Conrad, precisely.

March regarded him with interest for a moment.

"Explain yourself, Conrad," he said, calmly.

Conrad glanced about him in doubt.

"I would rather not, Brother March," returned he.

"You have said that before."

"I know it; I can not help it," cried he, wringing his hands.

"You can scarcely expect me to heed an unreasoned request like that," he told him, gravely. "Cæsar himself refused to do that," he added, with forced lightness.

"I was afraid it would be this way," exclaimed the young man. "I do not know what I can say."

"You might tell me what you mean, for one thing," said March, kindly.

"I do not see how I can," moaned Conrad.

March moved nearer and confronted him.

"Is it wrong that I should be there? What is it?"

"No, I can not rightly say that."

"There is no danger, surely?"

"No, no—oh, no!" he answered, wearily.

"Conrad," demanded March, with weight, "is it not my duty to be there?"

"Oh, I don't know!" cried he, with helpless honesty.

"You might think so."

"Then come," said March, briefly.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM the high stoops that clung against the sides of the dwellings, groups variously assorted and characterized were issuing. All were on their way to the church, but the fact seemed not to invite special clothing of body or self-consciousness. The families—from which the absence of young men and women was noticeable—chatted with serene gayety. The children, though as blithesome as profaner little people, were not boisterous, and all moved down the village street at a gait of peaceful ease. At the entrance to the comely church of blue limestone the talk suddenly ceased, and the clusters separating with silent precision, the men and women entered by their respective doors.

The congregation was still gathering when March and Conrad came in and seated themselves near the entrance among the benches allotted to their sex. Conrad's face wore a far-away look that strove to be purely devotional. March gave himself up for the moment to observation of the clumps of twos and threes advancing along the women's aisle with a reverent thoughtfulness in their eyes that might have lent a glamour to duller faces. The door gave at length before the touch of a young girl, at sight of whom March's face faintly lighted. Constance paused a moment to remove a wrap, and the congregation seemed at once aware of her presence by the kind of clairvoyance, in which even the decorous Moravian con-

sciousness will sometimes forget itself. An occasional matron stirred uneasily in her seat and would not turn, several of them did turn, and the children looked around to a child. As she took her way up the bare, sanded path between the benches, the eyes that had ruled themselves until she was within seemly vision, followed her to her seat near the front with kindly curiosity. After she had taken her place certain eyes pursued her with unsatisfied but always tender interest. The glances, of whatever character, had a touch of compassion.

The doors opened on either side simultaneously, and orderly bands of young men and women filed up the two aisles and swiftly found their seats. The widows, who presently entered together, were not distinguished in dress from those with whom the conjugal tie was unbroken, save by the white cap ribbons.

The scene was of a curious picturesqueness. Darkness had begun to fall, and a vague and reluctant light glimmered from the sperm-oil lamps, and cast itself in narrow patches upon the congregation. In the corners it was shadowy enough for the children to imagine ghosts, and indeed certain spectral figures flitted in this region from time to time, which might very well have been the disembodied spirits of the placid brethren of an earlier day. Where the light dwelt brightly it commonly showed a face from which the Moravian life seemed to have purified earthly grossness. Doubtless the simple beauty of attire may have had a share in this effect—certainly among the women. Their dress was not intentionally uniform ; there was no invariable society garb. But individual taste failed rather pathetically within the limits imposed by the use of quiet colors, and the scanty variety of fabrics brought to the unworldly village by the

semi-weekly stage. So, though there were trifling idiosyncrasies of costume, as futile as the fashion of wearing the beautiful neckdress common to all, or the manner of belting the waist—such things as no woman, not in fact translated, ought to be asked to forego—there resulted a certain sameness of apparel. Yet it was clearly the prettiest dress in the world, and that must have been a vain spirit which could wish to meddle with the essentials of its monotony. Looking down the aisle now, before the beginning of the service, March admired for the hundredth time its courageous primitiveness. In the uncertain light the pure caps and kerchiefs attracted the lamp glow, making a radiance about themselves ; and they were grateful points in the mystery of the centre of the church which the illumination failed to reach.

The wind instruments bleated gentle announcement and Mr. Keator pushed open a door and came upon the platform, followed by a company of elders and eldersesses. As they took seats with him, the music caught a bolder note and swelled into one of Haydn's harmonies. When it was finished the pastor rose and read a chapter from St. Paul in the gentle voice whose just accents nevertheless reached his remotest hearer. The singing which followed was alternate between the men and women, relieved, occasionally, by the choir. Mr. Keator's reading of the Litany was not mere elocution, but a fervent prayer, and the simple ritual took new meaning from his earnestness. His sermon was delivered from a meagre collection of notes to which he returned from time to time as he spoke to his people. It had the direct eloquence of conversation ; it was rather a talk than an harangue. He argued, persuaded, sympathized ; he rehearsed the Easter story and made its application

to their lives. He seemed talking in secret with each of the souls that looked up at him through rapt eyes. It was not a formalist, not a man doubtful of his faith, uncommissioned to his office, who spoke with them. His manner had the uncounterfeitable quality of consecration.

As he finished, Mr. Keator retired behind the plain deal table which was pulpit and lecturn for this plain band of Christians, and leaning his crutch against it balanced for a moment on his out-spread finger-tips in a kind of sad dreaminess. With a start he returned to memory and rather awkwardly gave out the final hymn. During the singing of this the congregation, which had listened to the sermon, forgetful of temporal matters of immediate interest, grew curiously restless. A single, magnetic sense, too volatile for analysis, often pervades large gatherings. It is not a thing which a spectator can define, but his perception of its existence is not to be argued with ; perhaps even the members of such bodies could not always interpret their emotion. The subconscious sentiment stirring this company, was, perhaps, one of expectancy. As the song ended and the quivering Amen rose in chorus, Mr. Keator stepped forward with an uncertain look that at once besought aid and proudly put it away ; but instead of raising his hands above his flock for benison he took his former attitude at the table and stood for a moment glancing undeterminedly about and leaning heavily on his crutch. His eyes told over the men and women before him one by one ; they circled round the dim-lit church twice, but refused to inform him of a certain corner directly beneath him. He seemed at length to compel himself to look, and his gaze challenged Constance's face, wistfully.

She was either unconscious of his glance or would not betray her perception of it, and the minister turned away, wearily. He gave a mild cough and made as if he would begin to speak, but his usual pallor sensibly deepened and he went back to Elder Weiss, who sat next the pastoral chair, and appeared to entreat him. The Elder nodded, and coming forward took his place, while Mr. Keator, seating himself with the aid of his crutch, regarded the scene in a species of anxious apathy.

The ready confidence of the Elder was in contrast with the minister's manner. He was seemingly not harassed by sentiment of any kind, but, launching a glance toward Constance, moved glibly into his vicarious undertaking. The people listened with unconcealed eagerness.

"Our pastor and brother," he began, "does not feel equal at the moment to the discharge of his painful duty. Christ, whose cross he bears in these regions, sees fit to chasten him, and he does not enjoy the health that most of our dear brethren and sisters are blessed with."

His look dwelt with unconscious complacency for an instant on his own sleek form ; then he pursued fluently :

"The Conference had a hard question brought before it at its last session. I suppose we might say it is owing to the presence of a stranger in our settlement." A flutter of excitement passed over the congregation, to the subtle flattery of which Elder Weiss was not dead. "We can not blame him," he went on, apparently finding the orator's reward in his work. "I should suppose we hardly had the right. He is probably ignorant of some features of our system and we ought to give him the benefit of the doubt. We are taught that when circumstances bring to our knowledge one of Christ's children he should at once become estimable and dear to us. But of

course we must protect ourselves. That we shall do by measures among our flock. As for him," said the Elder, largely, "we desire only to state the facts, believing that he will feel to do the right thing." Then, pausing a moment to recover from the colloquial lapse of his last phrase: "But our chief business on this eve of our Saviour's resurrection is not with him. Sister Constance Van Cleef," he commanded, raising his voice and throwing into it an awful reproof, "you will please rise."

Constance, who had been regarding him with amazement, now stared at him in helpless horror. Surely he could not mean it. The instant during which she hesitated seemed to March an eternity. He expected her to rise and leave the church. He could imagine how she would do it. Instead he saw her slip off the mantle with which she had covered herself, as if she had taken a resolution, and rise mechanically out of its folds. The calm, steadfast gaze with which she confronted Elder Weiss seemed to March wholly admirable. The Elder's demand was stricken under it with commonplace. It might have been a tragedy, but her passionless face seemed to say that she had come prepared for just this ordeal. Nothing else upheld this supposition, however, and March knew sadly its error. When the Elder had first called upon her he had not obeyed his inclination in keeping his seat; and he beheld marveling the proud motions of the girl which made assistance ridiculous. Ah, yes! Lady Amprey was right. She knew very well whither she was going. The Elder stood hesitating before her manner and she glanced swiftly over the large gathering. The people met her gaze with looks of mingled accusation and pity, and she turned at once from them and waited for the Elder to go on, with still hauteur.

Before this the company visibly humbled. She was indeed a sumptuous figure as she stood motionless in the wan glare of the lamps above her. Her erect, dauntless attitude clothed the Moravian garb for the moment with an especial dignity and significance ; and March, who had once said to himself that she was not pretty, wondered at his fatuity. For the space of the few rapid seconds that passed before Elder Weiss continued, she was something infinitely finer.

“ It is upon you, Sister Van Cleef,” pursued the Elder, “ that reproof falls. We can not expect so much from a stranger, though we mean that he shall understand our rules ; but those within the fold can not plead ignorance. It is with them, and with every one of them, that the cause of Christ here upon earth, in however small degree, rests ; and they can not evade their sacred charge.” The Elder warmed with his eloquence : “ It is a blessed privilege, but it has its responsibilities. One of these we understand to be obedience to the Church. The Church’s laws spring purely from the word of God. They aim to fulfill his will here in this temporary state as far as we can learn it, and you, Sister, however you may have fallen into the wrong, will not deny that it is your duty to obey your Saviour’s commandments. A whole series of these, as the Church interprets them, relates to marriage.” His hearers started. “ I shall speak plainly. The concern and even the presence of a stranger must not affect our usual way in these matters.

“ When your father, Brother Van Cleef—who we learn with regret is unwell—received Mr. March”—a keener quiver of agitation ran through the assembly at this open mention of the name, and Constance shuddered uncontrollably—“ into his house as a guest,” pursued the

Elder, placidly, "we did not object. Our theory as to strangers and respecting the proprieties of hospitality partly restrained us. If your own position toward the Church, however, Sister Van Cleef, had been more clearly defined, we should not have hesitated. These considerations would have been overridden, and Mr. March would have been taken to the tavern, or permitted to dwell for the time with some brother not having a young woman in his household."

The Elder paused, as if to emphasize the crudity of this mode of statement, and here and there a head turned and glanced sympathetically at March. When this exordium had begun he had sat listening fearfully, with a memory of Conrad's warning; as Elder Weiss named him to her, he clutched his companion's knee in silent anger. He heard him now through a stupor in which he could not command his immobile limbs, nor turn away the eyes which bent upon the Elder in concentrated outrage.

"You have declined," the Elder went on, "to associate yourself with the Choir of Single Sisters; and though you are a probationary member of the Church and wear our dress, you do not regularly attend our meetings. You have, therefore, not been held by the Conference to a strict accountability as our dear sisters of the full communion. Your association with the young men of the settlement of your own age has not been especially hindered except by your father's judgment, though in this we must fairly own that you have not hitherto overstepped. But for our own protection, as I have said, we must set a limit, and in the case as to which I am now speaking, we have felt bound to. Our dear pastor," said he, turning to Mr. Keator, whose face,

however, was hidden by his hand, and who stretched one arm toward him imploringly, "was instructed by the Conference to warn you. This, as you know, he did. You have fully understood, and you have gone on persistently—audaciously, I may say in the face of the Church's commands. We have no alternative. Your relation with this young man may mean nothing or not; we do not know. But the example which it holds up before the young people"—here he turned to the class designated, as they sat grouped on either side the aisle behind her—"is dangerous in the extreme. Moreover, the Church has especial ordinances, as you know, applying to strangers. One of these forbids the marriage of a member of the society with a stranger, another clandestine betrothals. Now we——"

The girl, who up to this time had stood bravely confronting him with haggard fixity, sank abruptly in an impotent heap to the bench. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" she moaned, in anguish. The congregation waited, breathless. Her head fell forward and some of the sisters near sprang toward her compassionately, thinking her faint. As they clustered about the bench, however, she leaped up with a hard, dry sob, and waving them off with broken queenliness took her way swiftly down the sanded aisle. On the steps without she encountered March.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSTANCE would not recognize the bitter, angry tears, through which she looked bravely at him. March came quickly up to her and took her hand, with eager sympathy.

"Don't mind it, Miss Van Cleef. It was horrible, but you will keep your courage. The sun is still shining ; the earth continues to revolve. Things seem black and strange to you, I suppose, but they are the same, and you—you are the same. Do you think that what one man may say can really change you to yourself or others ! "

He spoke rapidly, with no care for his logic. His aim was simply to console her, and her grateful glance helped him to believe himself momentarily successful.

As he released her hand, she murmured, beseechingly, "Take me home ! "

They went swiftly down the porch together, and along the street to the dwelling of Dr. Van Cleef. March cast furtive, pitying looks at her. Her suffering painted itself sadly upon her face, but she did not speak. In the anguished moments that lengthened between them he yearned toward her with an impulse of compassion that unsexed their relation of young man and young woman, and was almost like the lofty mother-tenderness.

Before her home the girl paused, looking up at the

door with an infinite melancholy in her streaming eyes. Then she turned away with a shudder, and convulsively seized his arm.

“ Oh ! I can not ! Let us go away ! Let us get out of sight ! ”

March drew closer the arm she had unconsciously placed in his, and went forward with decision. She thanked him for the assumption of protection and leadership with a look, and kept pace with his quick strides, as if she had lost all will, or was glad to merge it for the moment in his. His gaze dwelt upon her again in sorrowful sympathy, and, suddenly glancing up, she took it upon her face like a hot breath, and turned away with warm cheeks.

“ Miss Van Cleef, will you be my wife ? ”

“ No, Mr. March,” he heard her whisper. She did not turn her head.

They went on in conscious silence. They found themselves seated at last on a bench in the cemetery in the face of the young moon. The loneliness of the place was grateful to Constance ; it seemed to brood about her as a defending cloud. She sat regarding the spare lunar crescent stonily, though from time to time in uncontrollable anguish she wrung the hands clasped in her lap. The day was in those last moments which are neither light nor darkness. The earth gristled and blackened, then was bright again in patches of gray, then once more hesitantly black.

“ Ah, why, why should they be so cruel ? What right had they ? ” cried Constance.

March, who had received much illumination within the past hour, was silent. He could put his own offence out of the way, but he found it difficult to talk of hers.

"It was Elder Weiss," she said, more calmly, after a moment. "I must not speak so harshly of the people. They are every thing that is good."

"They mean to be."

"Yes, yes ; and when one thinks of it—no, I can't go so far."

"One may be too generous," said March, quickly.

"Yes, but one may so much more easily be too selfish and narrow-sighted," returned she, with a smile which cheered March in spite of its wanness. "In a way, I almost deserve it. I brought it on myself. I would not heed the warning. Yet what wrong had I done? We need not speak of it. I—don't see how we can," she told him, with a faint blush, "but we understand—you understand." She stopped suddenly.

"It was cruel."

"No, it was just. I ought to suffer. If I had done as my father wished, if I had become a faithful Moravian like himself, like Mr. Keator, it would not have happened. It is a judgment. I should have listened to warnings, I suppose. I should. . . . No, I should not," exclaimed she, with sudden conviction. "Why should I? How should I? They asked too much. They were rude ; they were insulting. They are now. Ah, could any thing be worse than that scene?"

She burst into hysterical tears at length and hid her face in her handkerchief. It was evidently for March to take the generous view.

"It is as we look at it," consoled he.

Constance choked back a sob and raised her head.

"There is only one way of looking at it. Do you think the outrage, the horror of it will not always remain with me? Do you fancy that the picture of Elder Weiss

standing there and stabbing me moment after moment with his quiet, wicked words will ever leave me? I know Mr. Keator did not mean him to go so far; the congregation may have thought him too hard. But does that make it easier? I feel as if I had been dragged through the streets like the poor wretches in the Reign of Terror; as if all that was most sacred to me, had been turned open to a mob. Oh, it was too shameful!" She paused for a moment. "And I can tell it to you!" mused the poor girl. "That is only a part of the shame. I have no longer any reserves. There is no corner of my heart into which the world has not the right to pry."

"Miss Van Cleef, Miss Van Cleef, pray don't do penance to your imagination in that way!"

She looked at him thoughtfully as she wiped her eyes.

"You think I exaggerate. How is it possible to magnify such a thing?"

"By letting others see how much it seems to you," said March, seriously. "Don't you see that it really means nothing for any one, but—but us, Miss Van Cleef? If we do not find it beyond remedy, others can not. They have not the right. It is our position toward it that determines the quality of the offence. It outrages you, of course. I assure you that my own feeling about it is strong enough, but——"

"Forgive me, Mr. March. I have been making you listen to my tirades about myself, forgetting your feeling. And it has hurt you, too! Strange that I never thought of that. To you it must be even worse. Ah, shall we never get to the end of the shame of it!"

"At once, Miss Van Cleef, if you will. It is really, as I say, only a question of our attitude; and I have proposed an attitude. You refused to assume it. Will you

not reconsider your determination? Miss Van Cleef," he begged, "will you not be my wife?"

"It is impossible that we should talk of that, Mr. March," said she, with the dignity which even in this strait did not abandon her. Then after a pause she added, with emotion, "I see how you feel—that you are bound to offer me that resource. It is good of you. Believe me, I appreciate it. I think I see my position quite plainly, and it is certainly distressing enough. But it is not so bad as that. Surely, if it is as you say, we can live it down alone, and it would be wicked to sacrifice two lives to it."

"I did not say it would be a sacrifice, if I may speak for one of them," urged March, quietly.

"No, I know you did not. But what reason is there but this for a marriage between us?" She struggled to say it judicially; her blush, however, would not be repressed. "And this, as I say," she stammered, "is not a reason."

"It is the best of reasons. Miss Van Cleef, I do not pretend that I am in love. Heaven knows the hints of that man were false enough. We have been much together. He built upon that, I suppose. But there has been no love-making, I think. We have understood each other excellently, have we not?"

This was not the fashion in which her fancy had taught her she should be wooed, and her woman nature shrank from the bald truth of these statements. But her reason instantly condemned her, and she obliged herself to take her hands from her face and let him see her crimson cheeks.

"All that would come in time," he went on. "We are accustomed to practicing the amenities. There are some

things we can depend upon each other for. I don't see why we should be unhappy."

He made this argument with the conscientious fullness of an advocate who feels that he has an obligation to make his plea complete, whatever the infirmity of his cause.

The flush kept Constance's cheek.

"You are extremely generous, Mr. March," she said, with a nervous smile. "You dramatize your inclination as an opponent, and argue against it wonderfully well. But I must not let myself be led away by such sophistry. As sophistry it's very good," she told him, with twinkling eyes. "It's so good that it may even be in process of deceiving its author. There is the more reason, therefore, that one of us should try to keep her feet."

"But—"

"I can never thank you sufficiently," she said, cutting in dexterously, with instant seriousness. "But you will imagine my gratitude. Yes, do, please, and we will not speak of this again. A woman at her worst must be allowed her right of decision in matters like this, you know," concluded she, with a smile of finality; and at this assertion of girlish prerogative she seemed to gather herself together.

It was slowly growing dark, and the slender moon began to make a dim radiance in the open place where they sat. The low-lying grave stones did not show clearly through the shrubbery in the waning light, and one could not be asked at this time to think the place any thing but a highly successful park.

March could not avoid a thrill of relief at her definite statement. It seemed to him that he discharged his conscience, in making this offer with proper urging of its advantage; it was obviously supererogatory to desire

her acceptance. If he consented to set a knife dangling above his head, he could not be expected to long that it should fall.

As Constance sat observing the moon when she had ceased speaking, this figure, as expressing a young man's sense of her affirmative answer to an offer of marriage, might certainly have appeared harsh. Her fine head, which was faintly turned from him, made a charming effect in curves, and the perfect outline of her face was prettily cut against the meagre light.

But, as he had said, and now reassured himself, he was not in love with her; and this is a thing which is so clearly a matter of taste that no one should think of disputing about it.

He said nothing in answer to her, and it was Constance who finally commented lightly,

"Isn't it absurd?"

"Probably," answered March, laughing. "What?"

"Why, that we should be sitting here in this prosaic, unembarrassed way. I can't imagine how it has happened."

To March the frankness of this seemed uncommonly admirable. It banished self-consciousness from the world and exiled shyness, while at the same moment it delicately instructed the observant listener that both banishment and exile were swiftly revocable.

"One would think we didn't understand the proprieties of such an occasion. It is a very embarrassing one, Miss Van Cleef, is it not?" he asked, smiling.

"Not if we don't make it so," answered Constance, critically.

"Ah, that's it! As I say, it's all in the view."

The reader, who occasionally finds something not

wholly congruous in the attitude of this pair toward serious facts, is begged to condone their foible. With March, at least, his unfailingly cheerful outlook was a kind of creed ; one would have said that he kept a supply of buoyancy in such portable vats as those in which Gulliver's professor proposed to bottle sunshine, and charged himself, if one might call it so, at frequent intervals.

"You are so good, Mr. March," returned Constance. "It is very kind to help me find a bright side to it all. But you can't give me a new disposition, can you?" inquired she, suddenly turning toward him with a half smile. "No, I think not. I have tried to take it your way. But I can't. I'm afraid it must make a difference to others than us. Nothing, I suppose, affects only those apparently concerned. We live in so large a world, and touch it at so many points. Why, a crack in the ice—it radiates in all directions, but it might start with one's foot. Even when one is only suspected of wrong," pursued she, with less calm, reddening faintly, "and is quite, quite in the right, the consequences are more than one could think. It is as well for men to talk so. They must believe it, and it is a pleasant way to see it. But it's not a woman's way, and it can't be. You don't know what you ask."

"I think I do—now," returned March, earnestly. "I'll even agree with you up to a certain point. One forgets easily enough that he is really talking to a million years or so of tradition when he talks with a woman, and I fell into the error," he said, quizzically. "But you are committed already as to our own fortunate attitude, and I warn you that I shall hold you to it. Having found the beautiful bravery to make so little of this which

might excusably have been made so much of, you can't recede. I shan't allow it, Miss Van Cleef."

"Miss Million Years," corrected she, gayly, but her lips trembled a little.

He gave a light laugh.

"You have a dreadful way of applying things personally," he said.

She had been absently twisting her handkerchief about her fingers. Tightening its lines with emphasis, she rose hastily.

"Isn't that *arbutus*?" she asked, and one might have thought that it genuinely concerned her; "it looks like the leaf."

She crossed the broad way along which the bench was placed and stooped in one of the lateral paths.

March followed her.

"It wasn't," she announced, as he came up, "but there is usually a great deal about here. I don't think I ever hunted for it by moonlight. Let us try."

She was not accurate, since the sun's light had not entirely faded; yet it was evidently not daylight. They turned aside from the path and walked together among the thinly ranked trees. There were no graves in this part of the cemetery. Their feet seemed to make a great noise in the dead leaves, and as neither spoke, Constance presently found an inexplicable relief in causing those over which she passed to rustle louder. She often stooped in the fading light to bend a green tuft that rose from the desert of brown leaves, with a skillful motion. From time to time she unearthed tiny sprigs of the flower, and exultingly took the two or three bells of pink, with their characteristic background of decay and freshest green, to her nostrils.

They came in a moment upon a cleared space, dotted with mounds of leaves, which had fallen after the last autumn raking, and had now been neatly gathered by the brethren. All the remaining light availed here, and with the growing radiance of the moon, shone upon an open from which the tender pink of the arbutus, half veiled by its leaves, looked shyly up at them. Constance fell upon it with a raptured exclamation, and plucked greedily for a few moments in silence. March stood watching her. She rose at length and picked her way carefully through the gemmed bed to one of the mounds on the other side the clearing. She seated herself on the yielding pile and March took one of the heaps near her.

It was not chilly in the glade, though the unpositive warmth of the day had left nothing that gave a distinct impression of heat. The Spring reached March as he sat idly flirting the arbutus with his stick, and furtively observing Constance, through a nameless and novel zest in the air, which he found a charm the more to know that he could not put his finger on it.

"Perhaps I am a little greedy," said Constance.

She sat erect on the soft dais opposite him, and held up a thick, odorous bunch.

"I don't think the flowers object. They are glad to be plucked by a lover."

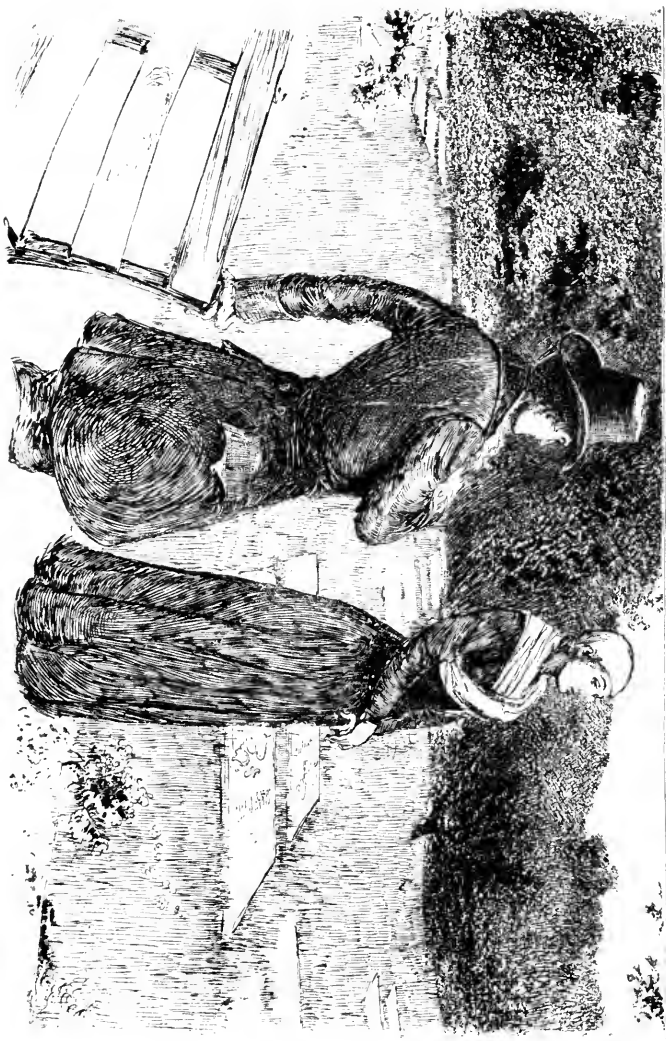
"I meant as to yourself."

"I shall be satisfied with a nosegay for my coat."

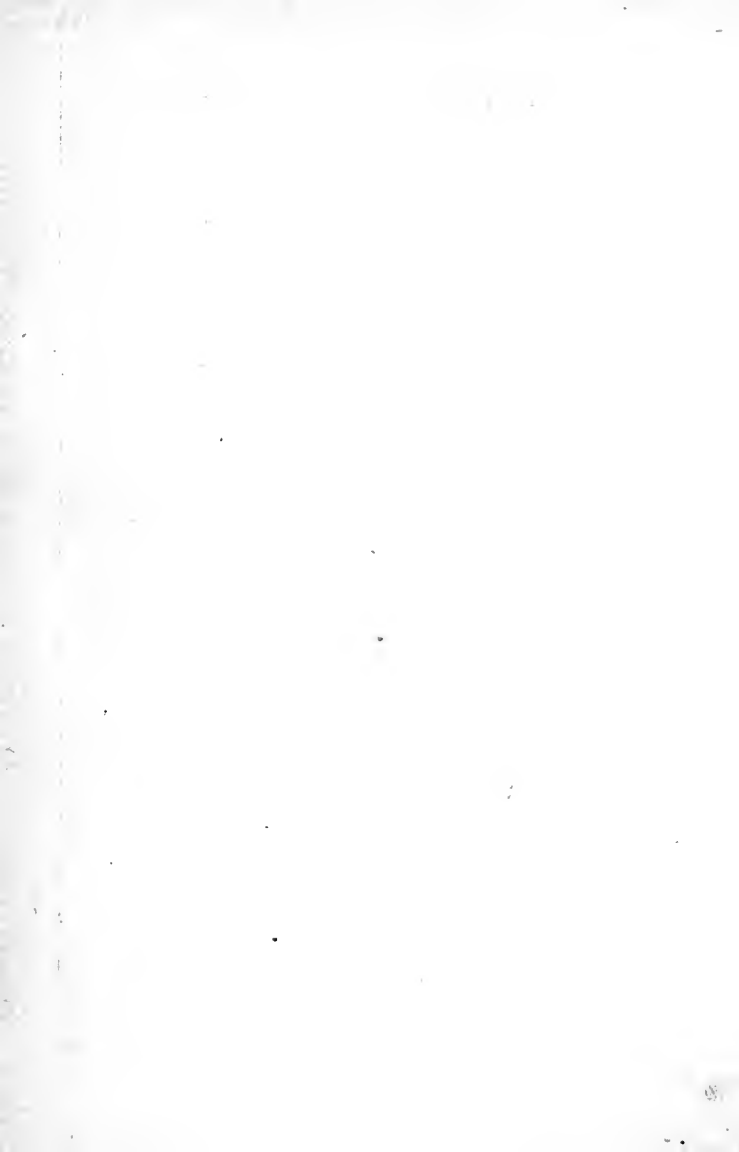
"You know I came out here for rebellion," she said, irrelevantly.

"I hadn't thought. But I've bought up all the guilt in the matter, if there is any, and I warn you I shall hold the shares at fabulous rates."

The lingering day abruptly died ; a faint breeze swept



"For a moment she stood quite still, in sad musing."



over the thick-sown fields of petals. Through the circular opening in the trees above the moon gleamed coldly. Constance shivered and rose. For a moment she stood quite still in sad musing, and presently she suffered the bouquet in her hand to fall with an absent motion.

"You have dropped the flowers," said March, rising to restore them to her.

"Yes, I know."

"You don't want them?"

"No."

Her tone was listless, not contemptuous, and she kept her place, in meditation.

"Come, Mr. March," said she, at length, with sudden effort. "It is late enough even for rebellion."

She compelled a weary smile of gayety to her lips, and led the way out of the cemetery.

There was no one in the street but the gray-headed watchman with his staff and lantern, who passed them, softly humming a hymn. As they went into the house his husky bass warned from the thither end of the town :

"The clock is eight ! To Judea all is told,
How Noah and his seven were saved of old."

March and Constance stood in the open doorway waiting silently for his last note. As the old man's voice died away she whispered, indicating,

"There is a good fire in the parlor. I must go up to father."

She looked toward him a moment with trembling lips.

"Ah, what will he say?" cried she.

Then turning from him with a swift nod she ran noiselessly up the stair.

CHAPTER IX.

HER aunt met her outside the door with her finger on her lips, and Constance shrank back with a sudden fear.

“What is it! Is he worse?”

“I am afraid so,” answered Miss Cynthia, in hushed tones, and as she came near Constance saw new, haggard lines in her face. “He had an attack after you left. It was very severe. Dr. Glick has been with him a long time. No, no, you must not yet!” exclaimed she, in a hasty whisper, as Constance attempted to pass her.

“Why not? Can I not see my father? It is my place, aunt,” she said, in a tone that Miss Cynthia would not ordinarily have questioned.

“Not now, my child! Not now! You would only disturb him. I am not in the room myself. Doctor only lets me watch him from the alcove and give him his medicine. What is the matter, Constance? You look worn and excited.”

Miss Cynthia glanced doubtfully at the girl through her spectacles.

Constance turned away without replying.

“I might have done something if I had been here!” was the interior cry that tortured her. Grief is unconsciously egotistical in its first moments.

“When can I see my father?” asked she, coldly, as she faced her aunt.

"I can not tell you. After a while. It is most important that he should not be excited just now. Constance, you believe that I would not pain you needlessly," said she, more softly.

"You will call me?" was the girl's only answer, as she turned toward her room.

"Yes, my dear."

These two had never come very close. The uncommon endearment touched Constance, and with a quick impulse she returned and kissed her aunt.

"We must support each other," she said. "There is no one else." She hushed Miss Cynthia's sudden burst of grief. "Now it is you, aunt!" whispered she, with joyless lightness; but a quick, sickening horror seized her.

The rarity of Miss Cynthia's tears made them notable. At this critical time they were a luxury burdened with meaning.

"Oh! why do you cry?" Constance choked a sob. "Let me go, aunt! Let me go!" she gasped, in a fright still only half familiar to her.

She went swiftly to her room and flung herself upon the bed in mortal anguish. For a space she lay weeping and bemoaning herself like any woman. Her tears ceased suddenly at last. She rose resolutely, and going to her mirror, removed her mantle, and quickly wiped her eyes. Then with a series of those dexterous touches, the art of which, fortunately, no crisis loses to a woman, she repaired the ruin which had overtaken her hair, smoothed her crumpled dress, and walked firmly down stairs. The wisdom of that arrangement of human affairs which forces attention to the cogs and oil-cups of life's engine while the main machine is convulsed by a supreme disaster,

has been often celebrated ; and it was the hope of a possible refuge in one little duty as well as her sharp recoil from the unworthiness and futility of emotion at this time which gave Constance strength to dry her eyes and go down. She ordered tea brought into the dining-room, and, having seated herself at the table, asked the servant to request Mr. March's presence.

"Tea, Miss Van Cleef?" he asked, as he came into the cheerful room.

"Wasn't it in your accounts?" she inquired, with one of her rare blushes.

It was very well to say that she would forget, and certainly there was other sufficiently grave matter for her thoughts. But it was not easy.

"I think I can give you five minutes to prepare your mind for it. It will take that long to make the tea," she said.

The table had been abbreviated and set for two. March's demeanor may not have fairly interpreted his feeling, but it would have been difficult to find in his smiling face, as he seated himself opposite his hostess with deliberation, and glanced amiably at her over the pretty tea service, a report of the occurrences of the day.

"Are you hungry?" she asked, for something to say.

"Very!" he assured her, with an accentuation of his smile.

She made the tea in thoughtful silence, while March told himself it was unnecessary to be in love with a young girl to have a certain pleasure in confronting her alone, while she made tea in a graceful pot on a table whose glistening mahogany and dainty furnishings frolicsomely took the light of the open fire.

He glanced up as she poured the tea and caught the look of pitiful abstraction on her face.

"You are not keeping our agreement," said he. "I thought you were not to take it so hard."

"It's not that," she said.

"Has that man—has any one dared?"

"No, no! my father——"

"Miss Van Cleef, is he worse?"

"Oh, I don't know—I am afraid. When I left him he seemed quite as usual. He begged me to go to church. It was to please him. He wishes some member of the family always to be present, and on Easter Even above all. But there must have come a sudden change. He had a bad attack once before, but Dr. Glick brought him out of it successfully. Now——"

Her voice faltered.

"It can hardly be very bad, coming so suddenly."

"I suppose not. I hope not. But it is horrible, coming now. It is as if heaven had heard my selfish prayer. It was that in some way I should not have to tell him. Ever since it happened that has been my thought: 'I must tell father; father must know,' and I have shrunk from it. I hoped and planned to get away; to leave here with him before he could know it. It was very wrong. He would wish to know. He must know some time. But still there was that cowardly instinct of self-defence. I know what you would say: Father is kind. He would not blame me. No, that is true; that is what would hurt me. I should feel that I had wounded him bitterly, and he would never speak of it, never complain. You do not know his pride in his Church, and the Church has reproved his daughter. That is a thing I could not tell him."

She had been speaking calmly, though rapidly. Suddenly her voice failed and her eyes filled. She took up the little cream jug at her hand and absently poured its entire contents into March's waiting cup.

"Now—*now*, you see, I *must* tell him!"

She gave March a look that demanded his sympathy. The logic was not clear, but he understood her perfectly.

"Certainly. I know," said he, musingly.

His eyes were fixed on the representation of Washington crossing the Delaware, above her head, and his thoughts had evidently undertaken a long journey suggested by her words.

"Miss Van Cleef," asked he, suddenly, "will you excuse me for a moment?"

Constance sat silently wondering until he returned. As he entered her face questioned him.

"Whom does your father consult in Philadelphia?"

"Dr. Fleet," replied the girl, mechanically. "Where are you going?" added she, as he turned away.

"To bring him, if you will give me permission. He is skillful, is he not?—eminent—that sort of thing?"

"Of course—the best," she answered. Her eyes followed him to the door with vague bewilderment. "But what do you mean? How shall you get him?"

"I am going down to the inn to book my passage in to-morrow's coach."

"You must not do that. Surely it is not necessary. You said yourself just now it could not be very serious."

March looked troubled.

"Did I? Well, it's not, I think; at least it is not alarming." Her face paled as he said these words slowly and with an effect of embarrassment. "But the fact is I just ran up and saw your aunt and Dr. Glick. It's not

bad, I gather ; but it's not to be trifled with. You know—that sort of thing,” he said, with a slight wave of his hand which he meant to be reassuring. “Not serious, you know ; not at all. But just as well to be looked after. I fancy Dr. Glick would be glad of a little counsel himself.”

“Does he—does *he* think father very ill?”

“Certainly not, Miss Van Cleef ; but you can imagine his being willing to have the light of a little larger experience upon the case. Dr. Glick is an excellent physician, no doubt ; but he is young.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” answered Constance. She sighed. “Do what you think right, Mr. March. I shall be satisfied. But I *really* don't like you to take such a journey for us.”

“Oh, if that is all !”

“Couldn't it be done in some other way ? Couldn't you send ?”

“Not with any certainty. You must know that, Miss Van Cleef.”

“No, no ! Well, if you will. But you take our gratitude with you,” she said, rising and impetuously holding out her hand, while she gave him her richest smile. “You must remember that. You are altogether too good, but we have at least the grace to appreciate the fact. And I think I shall like it that Dr. Fleet should come,” she ended, softly.

With that far-away look in her eyes she struck March as extraordinarily pretty.

“You will come back to supper ?” she asked, as he went, but the outer door had closed behind him, and she went back and finished the meal alone.

When he returned, a half-hour later, he ran silently up

to his room and changed his dress. Constance only knew he had come back by the click of the closing door when he went out again presently. She had been admitted to the sick-chamber at length, and sat immobile in a straight-backed chair with her hands folded in her lap. She had removed her cap, and the thick blonde hair disposed itself about her head with unconscious grace. The screen which she had set before the candle threw all the light on her absorbed features as she stared at the stricken form lying in the shadow. Dr. Van Cleef had not spoken or recognized her ; and had only stirred restlessly when at her entrance she had held the candle above him in grieving question of his pale face. Miss Cynthia slept peacefully in the curtained alcove, and Constance was alone with her thoughts. Her vision included nothing but the softly-breathing figure on the couch.

Her thought also dwelt chiefly upon her father, and when it wandered, soon came back to him and the relentless fear which she would not name. Her occasional mental excursions into other regions of reflection seemed to pain her, for she returned to the thought of the sick man with a frightened sigh.

Certain memories encompassed and solicited her, only to wound and thrust her back: Everything had been bright this morning, the fates seemed well disposed, the world welcomed her as an appropriate figure. It seemed impossible that she was the same girl who had light-heartedly bidden her father and aunt and Mr. March good-morning. In their innocence they had wished her a like happiness. The sarcasm was almost amusing ; she stilled a pitiful laugh. Had she listened to Elder Weiss ? Had those atrocious words been meant for her ? Had

they been spoken before the whole congregation, before the few who loved and understood her, the many who distrusted her for her cold allegiance to the Church and indefinable difference from them? On this day also she had been asked in marriage. That, one would say, was not occasion for a young girl's regret; but it had followed and grown out of the other. It meant nothing in itself. He had himself assured her of that. It was all part of the same wretched, irreparable matter. And finally the intolerable point—her lothness to make the occurrences of the day known to her father, and her present haunting fear that the choice had been taken forever from her hands. She looked into the future with a chilling sense of her loneliness: she recoiled from it as if she had been suddenly pushed into the storm which she perceived beginning outside. But the thought was tonic rather than cowering, and she remembered that she must be brave.

Constance rose, and throwing open the window, leaned out to draw in the shutter. The wind fled howling through the trees. A dozen swift, sharp drops, messengers of the storm, hurtled upon her face and head. Down the dark, wind-swept street a single light burned steadily behind an unshuttered window. It was in Mr. Keator's study. Her face brightened as she saw it.

"Not alone!" she said, thoughtfully, to herself, as she barred the heavy shutters. "There will always be Mr. Keator."

She stirred up the failing fire and threw fresh wood on it. As she went to give her father his medicine the storm burst over the village. An appalling clap of thunder shook the house and went detonating southward.

Constance stood erect with the unemptied spoon in her hand.

"Poor creatures who are out in such a storm!" she said, musingly.

"What—what is that?" asked her father, thickly, speaking for the first time.

"Nothing, dear father; nothing," answered Constance, stooping quickly at the sound of his voice. "Here is your medicine."

He sipped it thirstily as she held him up, and dropped back with a moan upon the pillow, where he instantly relapsed into his former stupor. Constance regarded him for some minutes in misery; presently she wiped her eyes with a swift motion, and regaining herself, walked into the alcove where Miss Cynthia slept. She had neglected to close the shutters here, and, the window having been left partly open, the rain was flooding the floor. Opening the casement resolutely, she threw out her arms to catch the shutters, which had become detached from their fastenings and were beating against the stone flanks of the house with sullen thuds. They evaded her for a moment, during which the storm drenched her head and shoulders. On this side there was no light. Far out there in the darkness stretched the Philadelphia pike. It was fortunate that Mr. March did not start until to-morrow. She caught the shutters and drew them to their places. As she secured them, "Why, to-morrow—to-morrow is Sunday," she exclaimed. "There is no coach!"

She went back into the light with a bewildering terror at her heart. March, with opposite intention, had imbued her with the deepest concern. Here was a loss of twenty-four hours. What might not have happened in that time in her father's present state? Dr. Fleet might come too late.

She felt that she must see March. She looked at the great sturdily-ticking clock in the corner. The painted moon above the face stared at her with an insane grin, but she made out that it was only half-past eleven. He might not have gone to bed. She hastily lighted another candle, that her father might not awake and find himself in the dark, and went out into the hall. A frigid breeze, that seemed to come from the furthest recesses of the old house, struck her as she went forward.

She paused a moment. What was she going to ask him? She did not know. She only knew that she must see him. At his door she rapped without hesitation; quietly at first, and then louder. There was no answer. She stopped a moment to think. Why had he not come back to tell her that no coach went? With a sudden thought she rapped more vigorously; she smote the door until her knuckles ached. Silence answered her.

At length she turned the knob hesitatingly. The door opened without resistance, and she peered in. The room was empty; the bed had not been occupied. Then she understood. Apparently she had more than one friend.

CHAPTER X.

EASTER SUNDAY broke warm and sultry, forewarning one of those torrid days which sometimes spring out of the cold heart of the northern April. The great festival was heralded at dawn by the joyful note of trumpets from the church tower ; and the whole congregation rose, and, preceded by the children, paid their annual visit to the cemetery with singing and the sound of wind instruments, making melody in their hearts to the risen Saviour. The air was heated and lifeless ; but later, when the faithful community filed to church, it hung inert about them like the breath of a furnace. At rare intervals, when the young leaves were faintly stirred, the slight breeze appeared wearily far from the beholder.

Mr. Keator went scrupulously through the elaborate liturgy for the day, and preached a sermon of the usual length ; but the exhaustion which followed prostrated him until it was time for evening service. His hearers listened laboriously, and strove not to seem fatigued and warm—an effort in which their failure did not discredit them.

Constance dozed restlessly during the morning after her night watch ; and when she saw her father again she was startled by the change which the heat had wrought. When the sun set and the cool breeze began to breed in the mountains and steal up the valley, she opened the

shutters which had been ineffectually closed against the day, and sitting beside him, waved a palm-leaf gently about his head. She was thinking how grieved he would be to miss the Easter services ; and her thoughts went back to happier Easters, when she herself had gone to church joyfully with her mother, and her faith was not such a wearisome, doubtful matter. Stray sentences of the Moravian creed, which Mr. Keator might be reciting at the moment before his congregation, flitted through her mind.

“ ‘ Who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in eternity,’ ” she murmured, absently, “ ‘ having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.’ ”

The sonorous phrases left her lips thoughtfully. As she finished, her voice grew louder, and at the end the congregational response came feebly :

“ This I verily believe.”

Constance bent over the figure on the bed.

“ Why, father ! ” exclaimed she, softly.

He opened his eyes with a wandering look of intelligence.

“ What ? Constance, Constance, did you speak ? ” he asked, with an effect of groping for the words.

“ No, father, it was you. I was reciting the creed to myself, and you made the response. You didn’t know ? ”

“ Didn’t know ? ” he answered, vacantly. “ The creed ! ” said he, suddenly, with awakened interest. “ The creed ! ” He looked at her keenly. “ Constance, my girl,” he asked, quite reasonably, “ do you believe it ? ”

“ Yes, father,” replied she, unhesitatingly.

"Yes, yes ; why not ?" He paused a moment with a heavy sigh. "But there are other things."

Constance was much agitated.

"Yes, father," she answered, chokingly, "there are other things."

"Ah !" cried he, gaining false strength for the moment, "I was wrong to force you."

"*Force* me ? Ah, poor, dear father !"

"Yes, yes ; I wanted to bring you into the fold. It was natural ; but it was a mistake. You were good enough as you were—so good, dearest !" said he, reaching for her head with the old motion.

She put it down to him, and he ran his wasted hand over her fair hair musingly. Then she kissed him, stifling a sob, and said,

"I can't let you say that. It is not true, father. You don't know." He made a weak gesture of dissent. "No, no, I don't imagine. If it were true, if any one could fancy it true for a moment, don't you think I would rather let you rest than tell you ? Dear father," she whispered, kneeling by his bed, "I've wished so that you should know, and once I feared that you would never wake to let me tell you. First I was afraid—wickedly afraid ; but that is gone. I want to say it now—I *must*. Father, listen—ah, you won't believe it."

"Darling !" With a supreme effort he drew her to him and kissed her lips twice, hungrily. "Darling," he whispered, as he released her, "I know."

She repeated the words breathlessly.

He nodded quickly, thrice.

"Mr. March—the church—Elder Weiss. Yes, yes."

"Who has told you ?" she cried, bewildered.

"Cynthia," said he, with difficulty.

Constance devoted a swift, grateful thought to her aunt.

"I am sorry it fell out so, Constance, girl—sorry for you, sorry every way. But it was my fault. I should have foreseen."

"Father! You shall not blame yourself. The fault was mine—wholly mine!"

He tried to frame a reply, but was silent, and Constance remorsefully told him that she had kept him talking too long. She made him remain quiet, while she beat and smoothed his pillow with woman's skill; and when she had settled him anew, forbade him to speak, and immediately bending over him, said, softly,

"You did not speak of it, father. You called me good. Have you forgiven me? Can you?"

"No, dear."

She shrank. Dr. Van Cleef smiled happily on her from his pillow.

"There can be no such word between us. I can not forgive you. I have always forgiven you. Do you understand?"

She stooped and kissed him.

He dozed for a time; Constance fanned him patiently.

"Constance," he called, after a little.

"Yes, father."

"I shall not be with you long."

"Father, father, don't!"

She bent over him with a cry of anguish.

"Don't take it hard, dearest. It is a solemn thought, but it is not bitter—not bitter to me, and must not be to you. You would like to keep me with you a little longer, perhaps, and I—yes, in my weakness I should

like to stay. But if our faith has any meaning, why should I fear to go? Why should you grieve to have me go? Remember that I shall be happier. Try to think of it in that way, daughter. It is a dear thought." He smiled as if his eyes were smitten with sweet visions and touched her head gently.

"Don't talk of death, father! pray don't! You will grow better, you will recover."

"No, I am a physician. I have watched others in like straits. My disease is peculiar; science has much to learn of it. I'm afraid we do not even name it correctly yet. But the end comes suddenly. I have always expected that." He spoke calmly, while she laid her face in the pillow in an agony of grief. "What I wish to tell you is not that—not that, exactly," he went on, with his old repetitive habit. "Constance, dear." She raised her tear-stained face. "You will be quite alone. Your aunt, I suppose, will return to her sister."

"Oh, father, let it go! Why need you trouble?"

"I must—I must, my dear. Listen. You will be alone, and you will go to your Aunt Caroline; but eventually you will marry." Constance fiercely shook the head on the pillow. "Yes, yes, it is the only life for a woman." He stroked her head softly. "Yes, you will grieve for your old father for a time. But in the end you must marry. It is that I wish to speak of. Constance, did you ever think that Mr. Keator—yes, yes, I see you have. He is a noble man, my dear. I will not question you. I will not even leave it as a wish. But I suggest—I merely suggest, my dear——"

The gentleness which she remembered from infancy in his treatment of her overcame her, and she flung her arms about his neck.

"Let me promise it, father!"

"No, no; if it makes you feel bound, I shall be sorry I spoke. I don't want to tie you. Remember," he gasped, faintly, in pain—"remember that I thought of it. That is what I should like to leave with you, dearest—that I thought of it."

He closed his eyes, exhausted.

"Dear father!"

When she was told the following morning that Mr. Keator wished to see her she looked thoughtfully at her father.

"I will see him," she said, and after a few moments went down and met him with appealing hauteur.

Surely there were matters between these two to render them conscious and defeat conversation by the very copiousness of the things to be said, if they permitted themselves to say them. For the space of a few unmanageable moments they were as far apart as if Mr. Keator had remained in his study. He did not speak of the scene in the church; he talked of indifferent things. But when he asked with serious concern about her father's condition Constance forgot her defences and insensibly drifted into the tone of frank liking and respect which were always the essentials of her regard toward him, whatever her immediate mood. She was nervous and unstrung from long watching and anxiety for her father, and she would not let him comfort her with his hopeful phrases.

"Mr. Keator," she broke out, "do you believe in immortality?"

"Miss Van Cleef!"

"Oh, I know it's horrible. I wouldn't say it if it weren't," she exclaimed, hysterically.

"Don't you?" he asked, with a kind of sorrowful sternness.

"Oh, I did and I do, and yet——"

"Yet when you are brought face to face with the question, when for the moment it comes home to you, you find yourself faltering and wondering. Is that it?" he asked, kindly. She assented unconsciously, hanging absorbed upon his words. "It is not uncommon," he went on, with a far-away look in his eyes. "Every one must have felt the infinitely slight distance in a way between faith and no faith. It co-exists and is not at war with the immensity of the difference—as wide as the world. It is simply 'Yes, No,' " he breathed, thoughtfully. "Sometimes for the slightest instant it is easiest to say 'No.' That comes in such a time as this for you; it rises from the very intensity of the crisis. But the soul affirms, left to itself, and the 'Yes,' when you have reached it, has tremendous force. The 'No' never has any force at all. In the 'Yes' you rest and live. But I didn't mean a sermon."

"No, no, you are very good. I can't thank you. What you say helps me. It is so true; and yet sometimes it all goes. But you fill me with courage," she said, more cheerfully. "You know Dr. Fleet is coming up," added she, irrelevantly.

"Mr. March took my horse. He was to use it Sunday, but I felt it was right," he said, with his native simplicity.

"Did he? I wondered——" She paused absently. Then, "It is too much," she said. "He ought to have waited for the coach."

"But your father——"

"Ah, yes, father! Yes, of course I am glad. But I couldn't have let him do it."

"No, he knew that. He did not give you the opportunity," returned Mr. Keator, with the faintest smile.

"We can never repay him," she said.

Mr. Keator studied his hat. Then he looked up at her with hesitating intelligence, and a wistful smile trembled upon his lips.

"Mr. Keator!" cried she, with incrimination.

The minister blushed.

"Constance!" he whispered. He leaned forward with a sudden impulse, and as abruptly retracted his slight form.

"You go very far," she said, briefly.

"I have but one thing in my thoughts; sometimes it will escape," said he.

"You ought not to see me, then."

"As you say," returned he, rising with dignity.

She was at his side as he reached the door, and brought him to face her determinedly.

"You know I do not mean that," she said, with low energy, taking his hand.

"No, I did not think you meant it," he answered, simply, gazing longingly into her eyes as she stood before him and slowly releasing her hand.

"I did not. But I was vexed. There is nothing between Mr. March and me. I have told you that. There is not likely to be. You have very little faith."

"That is true. But my act—the act which I could not reconcile it with my duty to discourage the elders in—was like throwing you into his arms. I felt that. I saw it. But I could not do otherwise. And now I suffer tortures from it. Oh, Constance," groaned he, "you must bear with me. I despise myself, but I can not conquer the feeling. And every thing appears to be slipping

from me. My calling seems less and less related to me day by day. Yet I love it. God knows I love it ! It has been my life ; until you came it was the dearest thing in the world to me. I can not see it go. I could not leave it. It is not what it was, and yet it is a thousand times more. Sometimes I fear I am neglecting the Church," he said, sadly.

"Hush ! hush !"

"Yes, yes ; it is true. I do not put the same vigor into my work."

"You have not been so well. You *are* not."

"Dearest, I love you, and I fear to lose you ! That is my malady."

Constance reddened vividly, and looked down at the foot which she swung slowly from side to side upon her heel.

"Mr. Keator, you believe that I pity you ?" she said, softly.

"Ah, that is not what I wish. I do not think I care for your pity."

"But you credit it ?"

"Surely."

"And that I mean to be quite, quite honest about—about the other matter."

"You do not know ; you may think——" He broke off the irresistible cry abruptly. "I have laid the train so well ! It is as if I wished it. It will affect you without your will," he said, hopelessly.

"I think not," returned Constance, quietly. "It may be some satisfaction to you to know that I have refused him." The dazzling light of joy that shone from his deep, lustrous eyes frightened her, and she looked hastily down. "I do not mean anything more," she said, quickly.

"No, no!" cried he, in a rapture whose confidence appalled her and gave her an intolerable feeling of obligation to its demands upon her future. "That is enough—enough for the present." Then, with a self-possession which baffled her, he asked: "May I see your father, Miss Van Cleef!"

As they stood thus she heard her aunt call her name twice quickly from above. She left Mr. Keator standing in the doorway and ran up stairs with a wild fear. For a long time she did not return.

"Father is very ill," said she, in a tense, stricken voice when she came back. "He has grown much worse. Will you go for Dr. Glick?" He limped toward the door and opened it, "Oh, pardon me, Mr. Keator," she cried, "I forgot——"

He saw that she meant his infirmity; he looked down at his crutch and shook his head with a quick smile. She tried to stop him, but he was gone.

When March came up the steps, half an hour later, warm and dusty, accompanied by an elderly gentleman carrying a brown leather medicine-case, Mr. Keator, who had returned and was sitting in the parlor, went to the door and let them in.

"Are we in time?" asked March, as he took Mr. Keator's free hand.

"He is much worse."

March went rapidly up the stair, and coming down again immediately, invited Dr. Fleet to accompany him to the bed-chamber. The physician's step was slow and heavy, like the step of fate.

For a long time Mr. Keator sat in the room in which he had passed the happiest hours of his life. Their ghosts seemed hovering about him now, and from time

to time he let fall the volume of illustrations of Palestine scenery which he was nervously fingering, and sat dreamily turning over the leaves without glancing at them. Occasionally a servant went stealthily up the stair outside bearing warm cloths and heated water in bottles. Overhead the swift footsteps were continuous.

Mr. Keator got up restlessly as night fell and went down to his study ; he took out a dozen specimens from his herbarium one after another and turned away from them in disgust ; the servant, when she brought his tea, found him endeavoring to fix his mind upon a volume of sermons. He said he did not care for tea.

Then he went back and found March seated before the fire which he had left.

“ Dr. Van Cleef has asked for you. Will you go up ? ”

Mr. Keator turned and ascended the stair in silence.

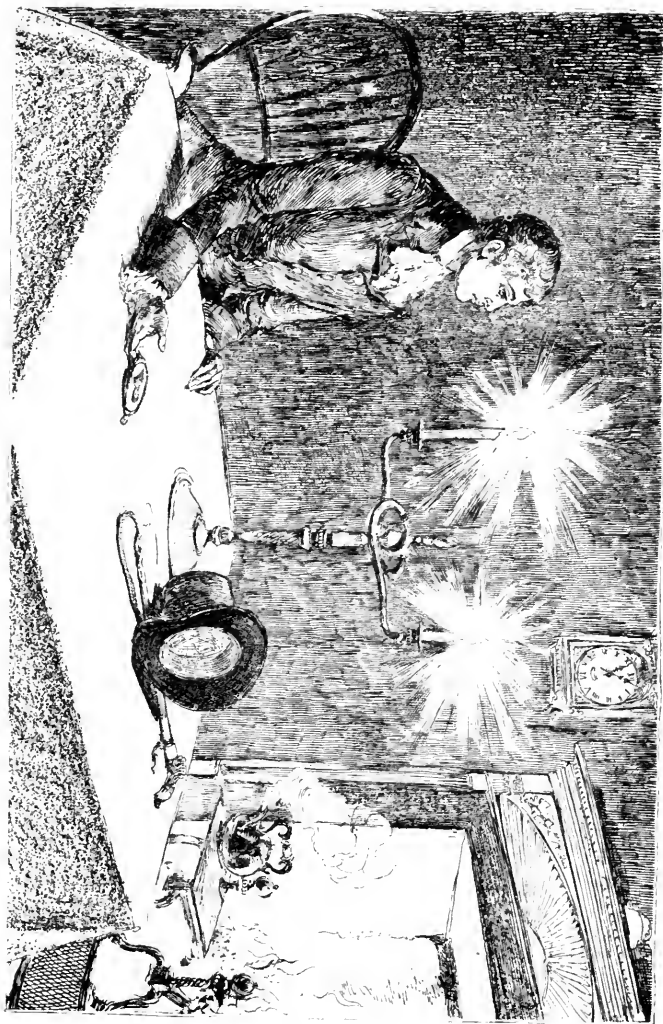
March waited a weary time. It was eleven o'clock, and he sat musing upon a miniature which he held under the light of the candelabrum, when he heard the sound of Mr. Keator's crutch on the stair. He laid the miniature down and went to him as he entered.

“ Well ? ”

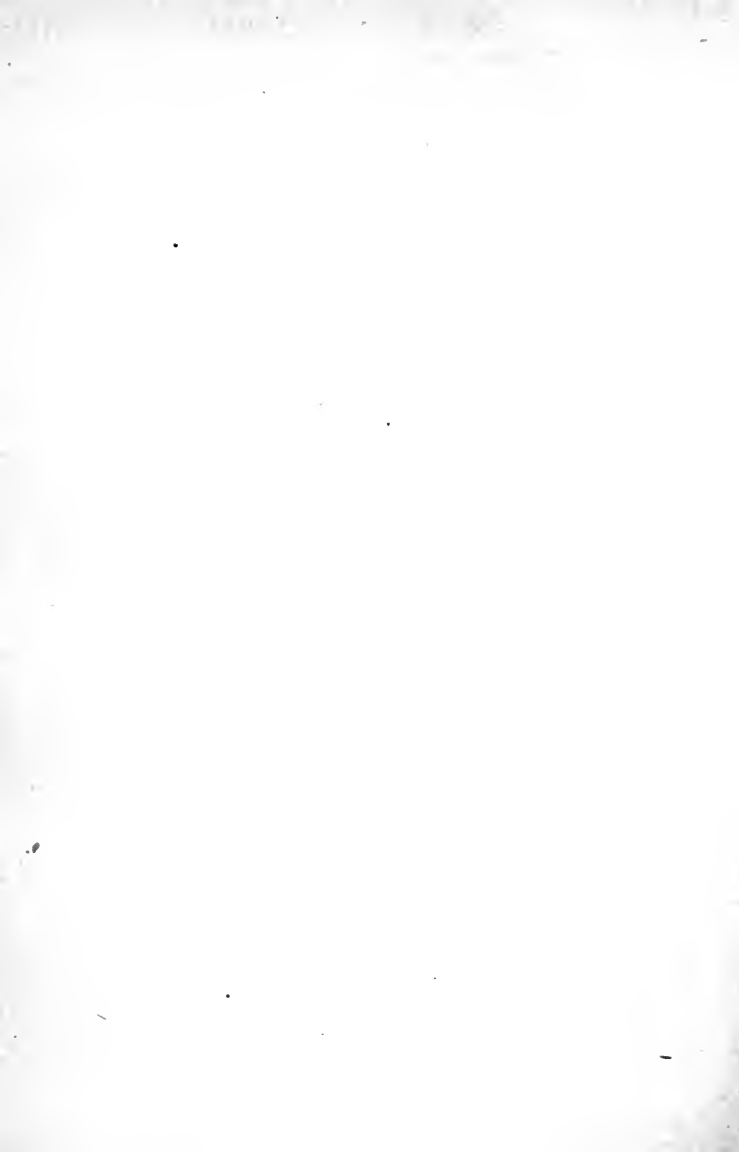
The minister's face wore a look of settled gloom. For a moment he paused, staring dejectedly at the floor. He looked up with an effort.

“ It is all over. Dr. Van Cleef died half an hour ago.”

March went over to the mantle, and standing with his arm resting on it, gazed sadly into the fire. Mr. Keator took the seat the young man had left. After a moment his eyes caught the miniature lying upon the table. It



"March waited a weary time."



was of Constance as he had first known her. He drew it toward him eagerly, and sat regarding it.

“Poor girl!” he said, at last.

March did not speak ; he was looking at the minister’s absorbed face.

CHAPTER XI.

A FORTNIGHT after her father's death Constance was sitting in the arbor in the midst of the garden. Her face looked wan and haggard. Contrary to the Moravian custom her attire was black. The shapely cap, the collar substituted for the neckerchief, and the ruffling at her wrists, which were the only points of white, rather heightened the somber effect. The poor girl herself looked appealingly sad. She had let fall the volume in her hand and was looking vacantly toward the rich golds and reds of the setting sun. Presently her eyes suffused and, reopening the book, a pretty copy of "Thomas à Kempis," given her by her father, she strove to read.

The types grew blurred ; she laid the book down and looked desperately at the luminous spectacle of the clouds. She had come out into the garden with a horror of the rooms within. They were all filled with a thousand reminders ; the chairs, the tables, mantels, pictures ; things that he had used or liked ; things that he had bought for her—all were vocal with his presence. This presence was oftenest her joy, but at times her torment. She had not constantly the sense of it. It came and went ; and sometimes she wished that she might either always feel that he was with her, or reach the awful understanding of his absence. But she could not bring herself to a belief in the possibility of her loss, even when the void came upon her most grievously.

She had lost her mother when little more than a child. Her memory told her of nothing like her present feeling ; she had had at the time of her mother's death, the child's unconscious hardness, its blessed insensibility ; and now she sometimes thought she had the child's incomprehension. Her cry as she hung above her dead father had been, " It can not be ! Oh, I do not understand ! " And now she lamented constantly, " I do not understand ! "

A wagon rattled down the long street ; as the sound passed a boy went by whistling. " How can they ? " was her thought. " How dare they ? " The world was depopulated ; yet things went on as usual.

Her first intelligent feeling as she came out of the unreasoning maze which followed her bereavement, had been that horror of the usual, the shock of seeing the world's people about the world's ordinary business. When they brought her a newspaper she had secretly wondered that it was still published. Such thoughts came upon her from time to time irresistibly, and she was glad, at the moment, of the rescue which she saw coming toward her in the form of Mr. Keator.

His crutch sounded sharply on the gravel as he limped down the walk. He looked more than usually slight and frail as he leaned against the post at the arbor entrance, his face turned half toward the mellow light, and wearing the smile which he kept for her.

" Have you thought that I neglected you ? " he asked, as she took his hand and motioned him to a seat opposite, on the bench which ran around the arbor within.

Constance closed her book and, setting it upright on her knee, clasped both hands upon it. " No, I hadn't thought that," she answered, with a quiet smile.

"It may have seemed strange I haven't come, but—but I thought I knew you."

"You were right."

"I felt that you would bear it best alone. One must be very near to give real help." His voice grew husky. "I feared I was not near enough," he said, so gently that she scarcely heard.

"I was sure your delicacy kept you away. I know you too, Mr. Keator," she said, with the ghost of a smile.

"You make me say that it was not altogether delicacy. I was troubled. I had not confidence to meet you."

Constance took up some knitting which lay beside her, and putting "*à Kempis*" aside, studied it attentively.

"I can't say how glad I am that you have found it."

"What?" asked he, absently.

"Confidence to see me again. I depend upon your visits, you know. I should not know what to do if you abandoned me," she told him, seriously.

He took heart from her mood. "What can I say? You are very good."

"Am I? By contrast, perhaps." A fly made her shake her head impatiently. "I have always been so far from that to you."

"I am sure you have never meant——"

"To be unkind? No, I suppose not. But it comes to the same thing. If I had meant it I ought to be able to find some justification for it; but to intend the best and always—Ah, I have not treated you well, Mr. Keator!" She bent her head and knitted industriously.

"It has been my fault," he said, eagerly. "How could you when——" He paused, not knowing how to continue.

She was finding trouble with a dropped stitch. It was quite a minute before she said, with a brave tremor in her voice, as she let her knitting fall and looked up at him, "Before my father died, Mr. Keator—he spoke of you. He said he wished——" She paused to conquer her tears. "Mr. March is gone. Do you remember my saying—. Mr. Keator," declared she, incoherently, "I absolve you from your promise." She took up her needles hastily.

He looked at her for a moment in stupid joy and wonder. Then he drew himself upon his crutch and went over as swiftly as he might to where she sat blushing hotly. He took her hand unresistingly to his lips and kissed it. As he let it slowly fall he sought her eye ; but she would not look up.

"Ah, I had not confidence for this !" The fond hope in his pale face fascinated her as she met his gaze. For a moment she was impotent to set him right.

"Oh, Mr. Keator, I am afraid I do not mean as much as you think."

He retreated a step on his crutch.

"What is it that you mean ?" he asked, solemnly.

"Don't make it a question : it is hard enough as it is. Sit down, please, and I will try to tell you," she said, gently. He found his way in a maze to his former seat. For a moment he bent his always kindly gaze upon her. It was richly expressive—too expressive for Constance, who turned away from it quickly.

"Constance," said he at length, slowly, "we must end this ; I have been pained and harassed by it—that is nothing. But for your sake—I will not go on troubling you about it."

"I feel your generosity, your forbearance," exclaimed

Constance.. "I have always felt them. I hope I begin to repay them by saying that I am inclined to obey my father's wish."

She expected him to rise, to make some demonstration. He merely strove to keep the fearful joy out of his eyes while he asked her, "Is it more than obedience? Do you wish it?"

"I have said that my inclination went with it," she answered, reasonably.

He got up now and came over to her.

"Dearest, let us understand each other this time. Do you love me?"

"Don't!" she begged.

A groan escaped him. "I might have known!"

She rose suddenly and stood beside him.

"Oh give me time! I don't know. I—I must examine myself. You may say I've had time; no, not really. I have always shrunk from considering it; now I will try to think—" She paused, and after a moment her hand stole to his shoulder. "Mr. Keator, you know that I admire and respect you," she said, with a kind of gentle pleading in her voice that was new to him. "I feel your nobility, your goodness, your unselfishness. No one could fail to feel them. But I suppose I should feel them more than any one else," she said, with whimsical sadness. "I should be willing to suffer all for my love of them."

"Ah, Constance!"

"Mr. Keator, take me as I am; surely if I do not feel toward you as I ought, I should learn to."

He yearned toward her, but sternly forbade himself. He was evidently suffering bitterly. "Why do I not?" he cried. He turned toward her with an irresistible impulse.

She kept him from her with a gesture, while she pursued her thought. "Father would have had it so," she murmured. "Mr. Keator," she said, hesitatingly, "let us leave it with a higher wisdom. You have a custom—you marry by lot, do you not?"

"It would have to be so in any event!" said he, leaping gloomily forward with her thought.

"Would it? then so much the better. You believe that Heaven orders the result, do you not?" appealed she, with the soft dignity which was not commonly opposed. But she turned away with a vivid blush as he confronted her at last.

"Constance, how can I say it? It can't be, my girl, it can't be; sit down and let me tell you." His face was drawn in pain.

"We can never marry." She turned a wondering face to his. "What I said to you the other day, the day your poor father died, was madness. I knew it, and was not able to check the sin. For the moment it ruled me; I could not get away from it. Constance, you have great power over me. I did not know how much until that day. It is simply this: when Elder Weiss reproved you he made marriage between us impossible. You know," he went on more calmly, "the presbyters of our Church can not marry without the consent of the Council. The Council requires certain things in a wife. One of them, of course, is active membership in the Church. The others—I will not affront you by naming them, Constance; but they are not broad enough to include the purest angel in the world. Ah, I needn't tell you that the essential thing is the scene in the Church."

"Yet you brought it about; you forced it upon the elders."

"It was my duty," he said, simply.

He put his elbows on his knees and stared at the arbor floor.

"Ah, who is better than you, Mr. Keator?" she cried, impetuously. "Why did I hesitate!" He turned swiftly toward her with an energy that awed and scared her.

"My darling, it is not too late," he whispered, with uncontrollable passion. "I can give up my ministry; I can leave the Church. Oh, the treasure of the world is before me, and I deliberate. I have dared to weigh you against a position, a profession. Forgive it, dearest. It is only habit. It is conquered; it is dead. Come, sweet: we need not stay here; we can go away. We can be happy alone. There are many places besides this—places where no one knows us. We could live on an island in the sea, if we must. Dear, if we love each other, that is the one fact in life, and we are the only two in the world. With the Church's consent or without it—with marriage, or without, if need be—we will pass what years Heaven may give us, together. Love is enough. All else is foolishness. Dearest, if you truly love me, this poor obstacle is no obstacle. I trample on it for you. I know not what sin I would not commit for you. Surely you will do so little for me?"

She had shrunk unconsciously before the hot, irresistible torrent of his feeling, but as he went on she found strength to measure herself and him, and she faced him, as he finished, with a glory of pity in her eyes.

"Poor Mr. Keator! I did not know that any thing could lead a good man so far. And do you think I would accept such a sacrifice? Do you suppose that any woman could help a man to such a fall? You could not accomplish it yourself."

He raised his head which, his passion being spent, hung dejected upon his breast ; but she would not suffer him to speak.

“ Please do not, Mr. Keator ! you shall not give the sanction of your saner speech to such madness. If you care for me, let it make toward something better. You say I have power with you. Ah, I know now why it was given me ! It was to save you from this.”

The revulsion possessed him, and from its vantage ground he looked back upon his appeal as a nightmare.

“ You do not say enough,” he said, after a moment ; “ you do not deal as hardly as you ought with me.”

“ I have too many failures of my own to look after to treat yours thoroughly. Besides,” she said, after a moment, “ I should not dare.”

“ Why, Constance ? is it a feeling about my calling ? Is it the old tradition of sacredness in it, of some virtue outside the man ? Yes, yes ; I should have seen more clearly, even in my passion. The ministry is not like other things. It is not, as I said, a mere position, a profession that I should give up for you. It is a calling, a something that has its unchangeable seat in the nature of the man, and its responsibilities to others than himself—to the whole structure of society and to God. All other things a man may take up and lay down. But the priestly office implies a dedication, a consecration. It is a divine call ; you may answer it or not, but, having answered it, it is final ; there is no retreat.”

“ Yes, and the world’s honor of it, I suppose, comes from its sense of that—of its permanence, its beauty, its holiness,” mused Constance. “ I knew you could not be less than perfectly loyal. I knew I only seemed to lose my ideal.”

A look of pain crossed his face.

"My dear girl, don't say that. Remember that you can always tempt me."

He sat moodily silent for a time.

The last rays of the sun kept a faint rose hue in the west. Constance's needles struck audibly on the stillness with their measured click.

"Constance, do you think I could have done it?" he broke out, at last. "Your faith in me is sweet; say again you think I could not."

"I know you could not," she said, briefly.

"But if you had yielded—if you—pardon me; suppose it—if you had consented?"

The contest of her needles went on for a moment like a roar in his ears, and he watched her closed lips as if they had been an oracle's. For that instant she hesitated; then,

"No, not if I had yielded, not if I had consented," she repeated, in a low voice.

Her tone had the weight of conviction, but the minister was not flattered to belief.

"I don't know, I don't know," he cried, after a moment. "Constance, after such a lapse I can never be sure of myself. I shall never feel that I have surely mortified the weak, sinful wishes of the flesh, unless I am offered the temptation again, unless I force myself to face it continuously for a long time. Do you understand? I would be strong by challenging my weakness, confronting it until it looks down ashamed. Give me the opportunity. Say what you said again."

"But then I did not know that it involved—"

"My calling? No; but now that you know, help me to assure myself that that is what you think it—a final obstacle. Furnish me with the temptation."

"You mean—" She dropped her needles. "What a strange idea ; wait a moment. I am trying to understand."

"You said a moment ago that your power had been given to save me ; that is it ; I ask you to save my self-respect."

He looked at her with a confident smile.

She took his hand.

"I will."

"Understand, dear, I ask it for some time ; is there no one else, nothing to interfere ?"

"No one, nothing," she answered, looking down.

"Then promise me that if I come to you and say, 'I have failed. I am less strong than I thought, I have given up my ministry. I offer you a life beggared of every thing that makes life worth while, of deliberate malice divorced from all good and noble things except my love,' you will submit yourself, as you said, to the test of the lot. Will you promise that, dear ?"

She did not answer.

"Does it seem hard ?"

"Very hard !" owned Constance.

"Do you think me oversensitive ? Imagine like miseries—think of a soldier who has turned his back on the enemy. Fancy his halting in the midst of his shameful retreat to wish with all his soul that he had not left the faithful men struggling behind him there to fight the battle without him. Would he not give all his future for the right to stand with them again ? What would he not barter to renew his self-respect ? That is not oversensitiveness, do you think, Constance—nor false pride ? It is a bitter human need. It is the awful need of a pure conscience. What do you think life would be worth to

that deserter, with the knowledge always pressing home upon him that he had abandoned his trust, with his heart beating time eternally to the wretched inward cry of 'Coward ! Coward !' Might he not better die if he is never to win back the peace of soul which he left behind him with his musket as he ran ? And then think what an angel of light he would seem who should come up as he stood there hesitating, and say : 'Your place in the ranks is not lost yet. No one knows that you have failed for this moment but me. Come back with me !' Constance, you can be that messenger of life to me."

"Yes, yes, I see," said the girl, with a troubled look in her eyes.

"I may have a more easily-tortured conscience than other men ; but God knows it is slothful enough. And at all events, I am quite certain that the need to which I ask you to minister is not peculiar to me. It is—it must be—universal ; else why do criminals long to hold up their heads again among men ? why do lost men and women spend all that is left of life in striving for the place they have forfeited ? Is it mere pride, do you think ?—a wish to be well seen of men ? Then repentance and reform are poor shams. If men do not seek the light after the darkness because it is a condition of life—because they simply *must* be able to walk upright before God and their own consciences, if they grope their way toward it merely because they fancy they will look better in it—surely then our preaching is vain, our charities are empty, and God's merciful pardon and peace is offered to men unworthy of it and deaf to it."

He spoke under great excitement, and as he ended, sank exhausted upon the seat from which he had risen, and buried his face in his hands.

Constance looked about her in perplexity.

"I don't know what to say," she exclaimed, at length. He raised his head.

"Do not say anything that you will be sorry for. I would not have you do that to save me from the tortures of the lost. But, dear, you know I would not ask you for a thing for my own selfish good that could harm you. I do not dare say it is a mere form ; for I need to rest myself upon your firm promise. But you have known me a long time. I think I may fearlessly challenge my past life. Is there anything in it to make you fear my failure?—anything but my madness to-day?"

"No, no!"

"Then I ask you, as friend asking friend, to help me ; not urging it—I would rather die. But stating the case fairly and leaving it with you."

Constance had at the moment an irrelevant memory of what she had once said to herself—that she would sacrifice much to do him a service. Surely this was a very small sacrifice if she had faith in him.

"Constance," he went on, "it is the condition of my life. I can not live knowing that I could be guilty of such an atrocity. It is asking a great deal and you owe me nothing—but I am content to abase myself so far as to accept such generosity. You hold help in your hands ; will you give it to me?"

"Would father have wished it?"

For a moment the minister kept a pained silence.

"I do not know," he said, at length, quickly, as if fleeing temptation.

"You know that if you asked me now, no consideration in the world would cause me to consent?"

"Yes, I know that."

"You understand that if I promise it is because I have implicit faith that you will never put me to the test?"

"I understand."

"Then, Mr. Keator, I shall be very glad to do it for you," she said, in a low voice.

"For how long shall it be?"

"Shall we say a year?" she suggested, kindly.

"You are generous," said he; "a shorter time would serve."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. KEATOR left Constance then ; and when he came again they did not speak of this compact. Constance had her own difficulties, and after they had discussed the near and natural topics growing out of every-day life and relations, which seem to be as necessarily preliminary to serious talk as a penman's flourishes to actual writing, she asked him if she might trouble him about some of them.

"You know, Mr. Keator," she said, with a kind of melancholy, "I am what would be called rich. Dear father left me every thing. Of course he wished something to go to the Church, but he said he preferred that as it was to come from my portion, I should decide how much and the way in which it should be applied. His—his delicacy," she added, shyly, "puts it in my power to show the Church that I have the best will toward it."

"It was not needed, but we shall be very glad of any thing that you may choose to do," returned he, formally.

They were in the garden again, for Constance found herself unable to talk to any one in the house.

"Then, if you will let me suggest," she went on, "I have thought that I should like to deposit with your board of missions, or whatever you call it, a sum that would produce from year to year enough to sustain an additional missionary at your station in the West Indies. Does that seem practical? Is it foolish, is it absurd? Tell me, Mr. Keator. I don't know. I only know what

Mr. March has told me." Mr. Keator paled. "He says the poor people there are in a wretched way. I only suggest that because I feel a kind of acquaintance and sympathy with them from what he has said. But if there is anything else—if you know something more urgent—" It was strange to see her defer so to him.

"No, no, there is nothing else," interposed he, hastily; "that is a worthy object," he added, quaintly, in the pulpit phrase.

"And then," she went on calmly, not noting his agitation, "I wish to build a hospital here in Judea as a memorial of father."

"That would be costly. You probably do not know how costly. We could not accept such a gift."

"Nevertheless I shall build the hospital."

"Ah, well!"

They had drifted toward the arbor and now entered it. Mr. Keator looked about him as he sat down. He let his memory-filled eyes fall upon Constance. With compassionate intuition of the bitter recollections which this little structure must call up in him, she went on, hastily, "And I shall trust to your judgment and experience to teach me the best way to do it." She was not so tactless as to use the false consideration for his feelings involved in such an open recognition of it as leaving the arbor. Instead, she continued, gayly, "Shall it be built in separate cottages or in a single structure? Shall it be stone or wood? Shall we put a gambrel or a gable roof on it? What rooms shall we reserve for the nurses? How shall the wards be arranged? Those are things I want to talk over with you."

"You have considered everything. Nothing is left," he said, with a yielding smile.

"No ; I have only considered the considerations. I am going to ask you to decide." They fell into a talk about architecture, in which they relied, perhaps, rather upon taste than knowledge, and finally, when there still seemed a little left to say, and the subject, therefore, could be decently abandoned, "Mr. March went away suddenly," remarked Constance.

"Yes," returned Mr. Keator. "His brother was seriously ill and his mother prostrated by it. He had a letter and felt he must go at once to catch the packet sailing the first of the month. He would not disturb you in your grief to say a hurried good-bye." Constance turned away with the sudden tremor that she had not yet learned to conquer at the suggestion of her loss, and rising after a moment, went outside the arbor and thoughtfully plucked a rose from the richly blossomed bush that climbed the lattice work. "He had a feeling, too, I suppose," pursued the minister, keeping his place, "about receiving your thanks. He commissioned me to say all that was proper, and especially to thank you for your hospitality, on which he seemed to think he had trespassed. I am glad you spoke of it. I was near forgetting it." She made no comment, but stood with the scentless rose to her nostrils, looking up at the profuse crimson bloom on which the refracted light of the vanished sun fell coldly. He rose and came out to her.

"Mr. Keator," she said, "there is one thing—the chief thing I have wished to ask you about——"

"Well?" he responded, kindly.

"It's not easy to say or explain." She paused, and let her doubtful glance fall upon the rose bush once more. "Mr. Keator," she burst out, suddenly, "can you imagine that—that all that has happened ; not only

poor father's death ; though that, of course, first—but the—the occurrence in the church—and all, have helped me to a new view of some things, have given me certain new wishes?" She paused, but she did not seem to desire an answer and the minister kept silence as she looked, unseeing, toward the faintly lighted West. "I would like to be good," she said, "that is all—good as my dear father was good, as you are good, Mr. Keator."

"You know what I would say," exclaimed he.

"Yes, I know," answered she, soberly, "but that is not true. In the Church sense I am not good, and what shall I do? That is what I wish to ask you," she continued, calmly.

"What should you say?" asked he, as helplessly as if he had never ministered to one in like trouble.

"Why, I want to know if I had not better enter the convent at Ephrata?"

She spoke of it with an innocent reverence singularly unlike her treatment of other things. The Protestant convent was also a monastery, and was the refuge of a scanty sect not unlike the Moravians.

"My poor girl! what do you mean?"

"Is it so impossible?" She sniffed the rose faintly.

"Not impossible ; but foolish, if you will let me say it of an intention springing from so good and commendable a wish. You have some theory of remorse about your father : that you did not join the Church during his life, that it found occasion to reprove you—those things. You do not deny that?"

"No," said she, staring again at the roses with the sad, remote look that the mention of these things always brought into her face.

"And for that you would shut up your life to the pur-

suit of a futility? My dear girl, the conventual life is a fanaticism leading to doubtful personal good and not justifying itself in labors for the good of others. I sometimes think the convent wall a selfish fence, enabling a skulking from duty to one's neighbor."

"But the vows there are not binding. I could come out when I chose."

"My child, why should you ever enter? No! If you think that you are not good enough—and, of course," he told her with a smile, "I am bound to teach that you are unregenerate—*do* good. Surely you will do something if you build this hospital and endow the missionary. And after that, in this sorrowful world, there is always enough suffering to cure, if you will."

"Ah, that is true! Perhaps, after all, I may best go to Aunt Caroline, as father said."

He regarded her for an instant in amazement. The swiftness of her decision startled him. "Nothing could be better," agreed he, quietly, after a moment.

"Perhaps he would not have liked the convent," she said, softly, as if mentally settling a question that had harassed her; and the whole proposition was at once as if it had never been.

"Miss Van Cleef, it is not Church wisdom, but have you ever tried letting yourself go?"

She smiled at him silently.

"Let yourself go sometime," he advised, with a nod and his gentle smile; and he felt extraordinarily worldly as he walked up the path with her.

She wrote her aunt and received in reply to her tentative proposal such a large-hearted, cheering letter—overflowing with motherliness and welcome—as gave the friendless girl happy confidence about her future; and

there was, therefore, no fear of a dubious reception to cast her back upon the secure, if barren life, which she might continue to live in Judea. The prospect was pleasant. She wished the retrospect were half so agreeable. When she came to make ready to go, she found this uprooting of old ties instructive. It caused her to sit down in the midst of the remains of her past life, and take that general account, that large view, impossible while she was still living it. It occurred to her that her disasters and sorrows were more or less remotely referable to her pride, and she resolved to humble and submit herself. It was a capital opportunity to begin anew.

As the time which she had set for her departure drew near, the thought of it began to have an unaccountable pain for her. She had not supposed the Moravian village in any way dear to her ; but it is impossible that one should fail to send forth some creepers in four years, and she found them clinging in unexpected spots, and with curious tenacity. She discovered that, independent of Sister Zelda, she had more genuine friends among the sisters and brethren than she supposed, and as they came from day to day to bid her farewell, she did not cheapen the worth of their genuine friendship in her heart, and the sense of its value was one of the things which made it hard to go. Her least manageable regret, however, was for the old house and her father's beloved garden. The latter she arranged, should be kept scrupulously by the same man he had chosen, and on the day that she went about to bid it adieu, she felt gladly, as she saw it through her tears, that if he could come back, he would not find it less beautiful, less carefully kept than he would wish. The house she had persist-

ently declined, against all thrifty advice, to sell. She had offered it first to her Aunt Cynthia as an abode for herself while she lived. For the only time since her brother's burial, and for the third time in her adult life—the first being a tribute to the memory of the poor fellow who, coming home to marry her, was lost at sea—Miss Cynthia allowed herself to weep a little silently. Then she kissed Constance with affection.

“I have not understood you, dear,” she said, as she let a warm drop fall upon her withered cheek. “I have only been learning to know you within the last few weeks, since—since brother's death.”

A look of anguish passed over her face which threatened a real convulsion; she controlled it so that Constance only saw a mild, momentary flutter of the moist eye-lids.

“You are a good child. You were always good to him, and now you are very kind to me. But I can not take it. What could a poor, faded woman do with such a place, and all alone? It is true I have friends—yes, many, many true, unselfish friends; some of them might stay with me. But it is better that I should go back to Sister Maria, in New York. She, too, is all alone. I should never have left her if it had not been for your father.”

But, though the house must stand idle and untenanted, Constance did not halt in her purpose to keep it, and she finally went away, leaving its dear old furniture, its memories of agreeable hours, its sacred associations, to console and mingle with one another, unfriended by the echo of any footstep but that of the ancient German gardener who had promised to look in occasionally.

Mr. Keator limped down to the starting place of the

coach, to see her and Miss Cynthia go. When he had made his adieux to the latter, he came around on the other side where Constance sat.

"I shall see you again before very long?" he asked, as he took her hand.

"Yes, yes," returned she, hastily, with a vague glimmer of tears in her eyes—for the situation rather than for her thought of the minister. "I shall come back to look after the hospital."

They were silent a moment.

"You do not wish me to stay?—you are glad that I am doing this?" she asked, with a sudden impulse, under cover of the loading of luggage, the talk of hostlers, and the stamp of the horses.

"No, no! it is best so. I do not wish too much temptation."

She looked thoughtfully at him.

"You must not fail," she said, with a light of serene trust in her eyes. She smiled softly at him.

"Not while you keep your faith in me," he whispered.

He put up his hand again for farewell, the landlord of the inn gave his last message to the driver, and the coach rolled off, while Mr. Keator stood with his head bared, gazing at a cloud of dust.

At the city to which they came that evening, Constance's way and Miss Cynthia's diverged. They spent the night here, and upon awakening the following morning, they bade each other a farewell, in which the valiant affection that had of late grown up between them was at no pains to hide itself.

Constance experienced a joyful sensation of freedom, for which she presently reproved herself, as the coach left the city and turned southward. It was true that she

“Mr. Keator stood, with his head bared, gazing at a cloud of dust.”





was going in a direction opposite from New York, but she was also going to her mother's sister, of whom, though she had never seen her, she felt perfectly sure in advance. She was also not without unsatisfied desires for travel and exploration, as she had told March, and the South had always held an honorable place in her imagination. It was true that Maryland was not very far south, and that Quinnimont only narrowly kept its place on the boundary of that excessively bounded State ; but to her strictly-bred northern idea it was to all intents semi-tropical, and at least she was not disappointed in the southern warmth of the greeting of her aunt's family, who had assembled in the wide, bright hallway of their home to do her honor.

"Oh, aunt!" she cried, in happy tears, as she was folded tightly in certain capacious arms, and patted and rocked to and fro for a moment.

"My poor girl!"

Being released, she was made known in turn to three luminous-eyed young girls, whose pure, clear cheeks and brows shone under the southern abundance of black hair. Having gone to their successive embraces, the ceremony of introduction to her uncle, who kissed her, and his son, a straight, tall young man, who shook hands with her warmly, was accomplished, and they all went into the dining-room.

"I thought you would not care to go up stairs ; you must be hungry," said Mrs. Echols, in the vibrant, melodious southern voice.

"I am *not* very hungry," she said, drawing off her gloves.

She felt a pleasurable excitement. Mrs. Echols let her keep her hat upon her crumpled hair, and made her sit by her side at the long table, saying as she poured tea,

"We thought it would be pleasanter to wait on you and have tea all together—we take it rather late, you know ; we weren't right sure you would come ; but Mr. Echols thought we had better take the chance. And we are *certainly* glad to see you, my dear," she said, giving the intensive its peculiar Virginia emphasis and value, for Mrs. Echols was not a native of Maryland.

"Yes indeed !" exclaimed one of the girls.

"What shall I put in your tea ?" asked her aunt, as the talk became general.

The table was almost overladen with every species of warm bread, conserve and cake. Little crocheted white mats intervened between the plates and the otherwise uncovered board. Two negro boys went deliberately about answering the commands of the girls and Mrs. Echols, which were oftenest to offer something to Constance ; at other times they stood vacantly still.

Constance looked interestedly about the table ; the girls amiably returned her vague smile, and she felt a sudden and wholly unusual liking for the quiet, sweet, serious face of the eldest, who sat next her father at the further end of the table. Unlike her, the two other girls were not tall, and their forms were of the generous southern type. Jacinth had the delicate, clear-cut northern features of her father. Her hair was worn drawn straight back from her forehead in the trying classical manner, and her effect was altogether simple, direct and charming.

Helen and Ethel had sweet, round faces, from which their bright, restless eyes looked good-humoredly out upon a world which they seemed to find agreeable. Their father's slim person confronted them from the foot of the table. From time to time as he talked, his keen, gentle face relaxed, and his dry, shaven lips wrinkled in

a fine smile. In the custom of the day he wore no beard, and the crisp lines of his visage were unconcealed. He talked to Constance in a rapid, facile way, and they all joined in an obvious effort to give her generous welcome, and to make the desolate girl forget that she had not always known them. It seemed to Constance that she was compassed about with friendliness, with sympathy, with secure repose. She looked forward to many happy days made vital by the charitable labors which she hoped to emerge from this peaceful citadel to accomplish.

She felt like crying for happiness, and instead she laughed with these kind people as she had not laughed since her father's death.

When her aunt came to her room to bid her good-night, she fell upon her neck, and tried to whisper her gratitude, and then she said she feared she must have seemed wickedly happy. Mrs. Echols smiled with a thoughtful sympathy in her eyes, telling her that was impossible, and adding kindly that "whatever we might wish, we should not let the dead always shadow our lives. The living had rights as well."

"Ah ! you did not know my father," exclaimed Constance.

"No, no, dear, and I can not presume to touch your grief ; only remember that the world was not made for that. We were meant to be happy here, whatever the cynics say. If we are not the blame is ours. Good-night," she added, and kissed her again.

Mrs. Echols was of a comfortable motherly figure ; her gray hair was dressed upon little combs and hung in puffs above her ears, while its unfailing abundance was caught up behind in a large coil. Constance looked after her with a spontaneous love in her eyes, which she re-

membered awarding to very few on such an acquaintance. "We were meant to be happy here." Her own narrow experience, she reflected with melancholy, did not sanction the theory. But it was certainly a pleasant and flattering one. Apparently her aunt's family accepted it in good faith. They were, at least, a delightful exemplification of its efficacy, and Constance fell asleep with a wandering memory of similar expressions of Mr. March.

Quinnimont lay with the early sun bright on its white dwellings and spires as she came out alone upon the deep piazza with its robust Corinthian pillars next morning. The house stood on a leafy eminence without the town, and Quinnimont was in a wide, cultured valley. Just below her she perceived a small lake. A cool breeze, sprung from the mountains that fringed the horizon, swept the broad plain and the lake, and played with the errant strands of her hair.

"How much you look like your mother!" exclaimed her aunt in the breakfast-room, as she took her cheeks between her hands and kissed her good morning.

"Do I?" asked Constance, joyfully. "Father used to say so."

The girls came down one by one arrayed in the invariable southern morning dress of white, winning the eye with its laundered freshness, and greeted her with the same gentle good will. She began to feel that she was to find, not mere shelter, but a home among these amiable kinswomen—and kinsmen she added, when she had talked with her uncle for some time after breakfast, and had been driven to Quinnimont by Arthur, his son.

During the day her aunt and the girls showed her the house, which rather astonished her by its vastness. The

great hall was in itself an immense apartment. A company of horse might almost have manœuvred in it. The innumerable rooms gave one a sense of freedom and spaciousness commonly reserved for buildings of more public use. Yet it was all very home-like, and the rooms were richly decorated in the taste of the day. The claw-foot secretaries and book-cases were massively embroidered in brass; the furniture glistened with the double lustre of hair-cloth and mahogany. On the walls there were some good engravings of intolerable subjects. Of these the grimmest was a series of representations of a variety of future states, and the most lightsome an allegory, in four pieces, of the seasons in the life of man. In a corner of the drawing room hung a brave colored likeness of the Prince of Wales in the unapproachable jauntiness of Highland costume, and above, a portrait of his rare father in the kingly robes. The inoffensive little girl with a kitten in her arms was there, and she smiled meekly at her brother opposite, arrayed in sailor costume and rolling a swollen hoop. Above the harpsichord was disposed a pair of curious bas-reliefs in copper, portraying certain terror-spreading Indian chiefs in the French-Indian wars. Two lugubrious ladies in worsted were represented visiting the willow-shadowed tomb of Washington. There was, of course, a profusion of family portraits, for the most part excellent, to be dimly seen at this time through their summer defence of gauze. Among these was the notable figure of Mrs. Echols's father in the Continental uniform. The bare, polished floors were strewn with Indian rugs, which one of Mr. Echols's seafaring friends had brought home to him, and from the same source were various strangely wrought daggers and ivory puzzles. Mr. Echols, as a New Englander, had the

northern habit of reading, and his library was good. In the drawing room the tables were covered with English periodicals and newspapers, as well as the Baltimore and Philadelphia journals.

Constance stole out alone after supper into the grounds and wandered among the big, arching trees, which let the moonlight through their occasional openings to illumine her thoughtful, happy face. She was glad to snatch a few moments of solitude that she might feel to the full the blessed reality of this refuge for her sad heart. Yet it pleased her to see Jacinth walking over the lawn after a few moments, and coming toward her. Constance's quick liking for her face when they had first met, had been confirmed ; but she had not yet talked alone with her. She came out of the shadow of the trees now, and made herself known.

"We wondered where you had gone," said Jacinth, as they met. "But I hadn't come to look for you. It's sometimes so much pleasanter to be alone."

"That depends on what company one gives up for solitude, doesn't it?" asked Constance, smiling.

"Not always, I think," returned Jacinth, gently. "Our best friends are no better intruders on some of our moods than enemies."

They walked on in the moonlight away from the house. Friendly chemical elements have no formalities to discharge before mingling ; and an hour may be as fruitful as a lifetime in uniting sympathetic spirits. So it happened that these young cousins, more surely affiliated by common feelings than by common blood, drew near each other.

The possession of a girl friend was an almost wholly fresh experience to Constance, and at the time a singu-

larly wholesome one, for it took her out of herself and helped her to begin to people anew the world out of which her father had gone. But it was sweeter to her, because more like her dear father himself, to find out a friend in Mr. Echols. Few things had ever seemed more charming to Constance, than his humorous goodness, gentleness, and wisdom. She had known others blessed with humorous perception, a great many with the talent of saying clever things ; but those faculties, it seemed to her, were as far as possible beneath the supreme grace of living humorously. She rather enjoyed thinking that every one would not understand this last venturesome phrase if she were to use it ; but she had neither a wish to make her thought public, nor much desire to go far in attempting to describe to herself the source of her uncle's charm. She preferred to rejoice inwardly in her growing understanding of a good man in whom humor was not only the shrewd friend of all the virtues, but seemed to be the parent of his most lovable traits.

Mr. Echols was seldom merely witty, but he was full of droll whimsies which he enjoyed making Constance acquainted with when they began to find themselves sympathetic spirits. She discovered him upon the portico one morning, before breakfast, studying a map which lay on a chair before him.

"Do you ever fish, Constance?" he asked, with twinkling eyes, as she came toward him.

"No, uncle," returned she. "Why?" She smiled in anticipation.

"Why, I do, and I want your company."

"You, uncle? I didn't know you were strong enough for long tramps."

"I'm not. The thought does credit to your discern-

ment. That is the reason I fish at home. Take a seat, my dear."

Constance took one of the chairs on the piazza with a vague smile.

He unfolded the map, on which Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware were represented at large, and spread it on a table before them. Constance began to understand.

"I can't physically, 'go fishing,' as the expression is, so I make excursions in fancy. You've no idea what long tramps I take—on the map—with the precious advantage that I return home as fresh as when I started."

"Do you catch anything?" asked Constance, amused.

"Everything. Don't you see what a field it opens? I catch excellent brook trout in this stream you see running down through southern Pennsylvania. There are some very good small fish nearer home, in the Antietam. In season I am highly successful with shad in the Potomac. And the Chesapeake—! I find everything there, though it's a rather long jaunt. Suppose we try a cast after breakfast?"

"But I'm not an enthusiast. I'm afraid I should be tired before the day is out," laughed Constance, finding this admirable fooling.

"Pooh! pooh! You don't suppose I give the day to it; I've other things to do. No, by my method I take a long day's fishing in half an hour. I can get a pretty full week out of a morning."

"Ah, then," cried the girl, "let us start at once! If we waited until after breakfast we should have time to exhaust the Potomac, and that would scarcely be fair to the other fishermen!"

After this they often went on brief piscatorial excur-

sions, and when later they went gunning instead, their success was phenomenal.

When Mr. Echols went to Quinnimont to play chess at his club, she drove him in the pony carriage which she presently purchased for her own use. While he played, she went about on her own missionary errands among the poor of the place, who soon became her fast adherents. Her charity was indeed a more availing and less spasmodic matter than it had been in Judea, and she was presently known in Quinnimont as having accomplished a genuine and important work. In the drives home they chatted of an immense variety of things. Mr. Echols had been a wide traveller and talked very well of his travels, as indeed he did of all things.

In the evening, when they all gathered in the drawing room, he read to them in his gentle, sonorous voice, or oftener played a rubber at whist with them, or at cribbage with Constance alone.

In the midst of this happy life Constance often gave backward thoughts to days which seemed strangely unrelated to the present. She could very well have believed that many things which she remembered had happened to some other girl whom she knew and felt an interest in. One thing, which she still never recalled without a shameful blush, she would have gladly transferred to another's memory and conscience, but the recollection of it dwelt in her with an anguishing pang, and this, with the thought of her father—become a less prominent but not less poignant thought—were the only failures in her bliss.

Occasionally she devoted a faintly remorseful glance to March. The shame and mortification which he had generously forborne to let her see must have been keen enough. She wished that he had given her opportunity to

say her gratitude, to beg forgiveness for the self-will that had brought him such pain. But in her most enlightened moments she doubted whether she would have given expression to these feelings if his departure had been less hasty. March had never been to her quite as other men. She was aware that there were things which she could not say to him. And now a wall seemed to be building itself between her and her past life. When she climbed up occasionally to take a peep, she hastily got down, shuddering. The memory of her treatment of him was one of the things that made her retrospects brief. As she looked back at her whole relation with him, despite certain golden reminiscences, which she knew not where else to parallel, it took on an intolerable aspect. Of one thing she was clear : whatever she might once have spurred herself to do, she should not be able to speak of these things if she saw him again. The futility of fortifying herself in advance against a meeting so impossible suddenly touched her humorous sense, and she found it worth laughing at.

A moment later she said to herself that destinies so intimately mingled did not disentangle themselves with facility. Fate was an ironical dame ; but her irony did not go so far. It was impossible.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was some months later, as she sat one day sewing with her aunt, that the card of a visitor was brought to her.

“Say that I can’t see any one,” she said. Then, glancing at the card, her face brightened. “Tell him I will be down at once.”

Frederick Lincoln rose with a glad smile on his handsome face as she entered, and tried to say how much it rejoiced him to see her again. He was evidently sincere, and Constance, on her part, felt the kind of pleasure in his presence which a breath of the sophisticated, instructed, refined, faintly artificial city air had always given her since she had left New York. The thought of it all came back to her with a rush, and in a moment she was being borne along upon fragrant, memorial clouds. The life, the traditions and sentiments of which she had been so intimately part, returned to her for the instant as if she had never broken with them.

The young man’s dress emphasized his urban manner. It was irreproachable, according to the fashion of the day ; but his lofty collar, the stock, the elaborately ruffled shirt, and his fob, so far from appearing irrelevant spangles, seemed, as he wore them, the inevitable adornments of a gentleman. He was not tall, and for a young man, rather stout. His fair hair was cut close about a

well-made head. He had a prominent forehead, and large, alert, roving eyes shaded by glasses which in his case had the distinguishing effect. They sat upon a nose, the slight lateral curve of which, due to an accident in childhood, was not without the charm attaching to more heroic scars. When wonted to it one found himself liking it. He kept his hat in his hand and tapped his knee lightly with it as he talked.

"You will pardon me, Miss Constance," he said, as he seated himself after their greeting, "if I make the inane traditional remark that you have grown ; and you won't expect me to add that you 'feature' your cousin or your grandfather?"

He sat smiling at her with great amiability ; and a look of ready tolerance for all the world.

"Yes, I've grown," assented Constance, giving his smile back, joyously. "You have given me time."

"Oh, I protest ! It is a long while since you came down here in the coach, or you wouldn't say that. You have ceased to be physically reminded of the rocks and bumps and hollows. For my part, I am kept in remembrance of them."

"It is some time since I left New York," musingly agreed Constance, giving reins to her memory. "I wonder you recall me. So much must have happened since then in the city. It is like a deposit of geological drift on the memory of people who haven't been there in four years. You were courageous to dig through to me, Mr. Lincoln."

"I have always thought of you, Miss Constance," he answered her, reproachfully. "We were neither of us very old when we knew each other so well," said he, with the easy scorn of a young man of twenty-five for himself

at twenty-one. "But we enjoyed ourselves, I suppose, just as well as if we had known more ; or, at least," he made haste to add, with a smile of humorous apology, "I did."

"Those were very happy days," said Constance, with unconscious wistfulness. "I have liked to think of them, to continue them in imagination. Do you remember the pleasant things that we used to do?"

"There were a great many of them."

"Yes, were there not? The long drives to King's Bridge, the ices at Barriere's, the skating and the theatre. Do you recall the night we saw Mr. Cooper as *Hamlet*? I have always remembered that. He was capital, I thought, then."

"And the routs at Mrs. Schenk's and Mrs. Vanderpool's up in Second Avenue, and that generous fellow's—what was his name?—bachelor, sister received with him—"

"De Ranke?"

"De Ranke; that's it!"

The topic proved fruitful, and they gave themselves up interestedly to the discussion of these reminiscences for a long time. At length, when a pause fell:

"I wonder if you can tell me where I shall find a friend of mine, who is also a friend of yours?" asked Lincoln.

"I don't know," returned Constance, still smiling at something they had just been saying, and bringing herself to the consideration of his question with an effort—

"Whom?"

"Owen March."

"Owen March! Why, do you know Mr. March?"

"Yes."

"But he never told me."

"Indeed? You must have been at a loss to explain my presence here, then."

Constance put her hand to her mouth and permitted herself a joyous laugh.

"Hopelessly!"

Lincoln promptly joined her.

"That is *not* bad. Don't suppose my stupidity has increased in proportion to the time since we met. I was thinking of March."

"I see."

"I am to pass my vacation with him. But first I came here. I remembered that I should see you."

"Ah, that is better! But I don't know why you should suppose me acquainted with Mr. March's whereabouts. He is a great way from here. I can tell you that."

"Oh, not so far, I think, unless my geography is all out. What county is this? Everything goes by counties in the South."

"I can't say, I'm sure—but Mr. March is not in it, if you mean that. He is in England."

"He was. But haven't you heard?"

She looked at him curiously and passed her handkerchief quickly over her lips.

"I suppose not," said she, smiling. "Do I look intelligent?"

"Why, he only went over on account of his brother, you know. After his death——"

"He is dead, then—his brother? I am very sorry."

"I don't know that you need be. He was a poor fellow, I fancy. The younger son was the favorite. Sir John was greatly grieved when he came over here; but he took it very well. He thought it a queer whim."

"Did you?" she asked.

"I? Oh, I don't know. Yes, I thought it a little odd. Well, it is odd. The younger sons of baronets don't become dissatisfied with the run of things in their native land and come across to see what they can do for their fellow-unfortunates often—at least, not every day, you know."

"Yes, I know. I always liked it in him that he had the courage to be different from others."

"He was very well off over there," said Lincoln.

"Certainly, or his bravery would not have been costly. And now he has come back?"

"Yes, for a long stay this voyage, he says. He has brought his colony with him this time, and he means to remain and see it started. It is really a fine thing to do. You see, he is the eldest son now. He will have the title."

She mused a moment.

"Where is he now?" she asked.

"That is what I expected you to tell me. He wrote me that Quinnimont was the largest place near him."

"Then he is not far from here?"

"Certainly not. He found the place, I think, after he came to you in Judea. Do you remember his going away for a day or two while he was with you? He wrote me about it at the time. It was then he decided upon it. He calls it Gerrit, after an American who once saved his life in Germany."

"That is graceful."

"Yes, March has a way of doing graceful things, if you have noticed. It would be culpable in any one else; but his manner implies that you invariably do the graceful thing yourself, or at least that you only lack

opportunity. When one thinks of it, I suppose, that is a graceful attitude itself. But it is astonishing how readily one forgives it."

Constance listened smilingly ; but—"Gerrit ?" she mused. "Gerrit ? Oh, I know ! It is the English colony near Afton. My uncle told us of it only the other day. And we had a long talk about it. He thought it a hopeful sign, and I remember he said that such a plan, well carried out, would be a great thing for the country. I suppose it would. And Mr. March is at the head of it," she ended, absently.

"You know of the place, then ? You can direct me."

"My uncle can," said Constance, remotely, her thoughts still surveying distant regions. "It is on the National Pike." Then, returning to herself, "You will not go on to-night ?" she said, cordially. "You must let us keep you until to-morrow."

Lincoln assented readily to this agreeable proposal, and she presently led him out upon the lawn, where her aunt was seated with Jacinth.

"You know, Miss Constance," he said, as they went down the steps, "I was to have seen you at Judea. It was all planned. I was to run down and spend a few days with March. Will you let me say," asked the young man, with gentle earnestness, "that it will always be one of my regrets that my slothful movements deprived me of seeing your father again ? You won't think it strange that I haven't spoken of your sorrow before ?"

Constance's eyes filled.

"Ah, I see that I ought to have let you take my sympathy for granted. Men always bungle these things. But your father was very dear to me."

"Yes, yes ; and he was fond of you. Don't miscon-

strue my weakness. I am glad to have any one speak of him who cared for him. It somehow helps me."

Her tears were gone as they came up to the group on the lawn, but she introduced him in a subdued voice and turned away immediately. Lincoln needed no supporting impulse to a conversation for which he straightway made himself responsible; and he was even presently upon almost jocular terms with the reserved Jacinth.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARCH rode over next morning. Lincoln had written him that he should stop as he went through Quinnimont to see Constance, and this intimation that Miss Van Cleef had changed her residence for one so near Gerrit caused him a pleasurable shock of surprise. He felt that he should like greatly to see her again ; he remembered that he owed her an apology for his unavoidably abrupt departure from Judea.

As to Miss Van Cleef his mind was far from blank. He had a group of distinct impressions regarding her, and most of them were in the highest degree pleasant. He was greatly interested to know how she had come out of her trial. Her love for her father had been deep. It must have been a cruel sorrow. But he had great faith in her strength. She would have issued from the ordeal purified, he was sure ; if it had not quite blighted her, his knowledge of her informed him that she would have been enlarged and uplifted by experience. The expression of her personality had been systematically repressed under the strict conditions of her life in Judea. In her emancipation he wondered what new light had come to her, or rather how the removal of the close shade, through which her abundant light had hitherto shone fitfully, had affected her. He said to himself that he was fortunate to have the opportunity of satisfying his curiosity to see her again, and, after giving Lincoln

time to reach Quinnimont, he rode over to that compact, clean little town.

Lincoln, catching sight of him as he came cantering up the shaded avenue, left the breakfast-table and ran out with his napkin in his hand to meet him. They made their mutual greetings as they walked to the stable together, leading March's horse. When they returned to the house breakfast was over, and a graceful family group was seated on the long portico.

Constance sat on the top step comfortably curled against one of the fat pillars. She rose with a glad smile as she observed March, and stood waiting on the steps. Their hands met in a clasp of hearty friendliness, and March remained a moment smiling up at her as she stood above him.

"You are looking well," was all he found to say. Then he passed quickly by her and took the hands whose owners Lincoln named to him.

A tingling current ran through him from her touch which these handclasps did not stale. He seated himself in the chair which one of the younger girls brought him, with an infinitely agreeable sense of calm excitement, which he made no attempt to account for.

The heavily turfed lawn, from which the morning dew had scarcely passed, wore a generous green. Its striking breadth was flanked by double rows of maples and poplars, and wandered down, after its first noble sweep, among the slim, sun-lit boles of a scattered pine grove. The roadway, shaded by the maples, which above interlaced among the opposite silver poplars, swung in a liberal curve on either side the wide space of green. The lake showed a narrow, watery belt below the pines. It reminded March faintly of Devonshire.

Constance seated herself against the pillar again, and with her hands folded about her waist, listened quietly to the phrases in which March was expressing his admiration of the neighboring country to Mr. Echols.

For the first time March saw her with her head entirely uncovered. The prim little cap, in which he had been used to see her, had lent her, he perceived, a foreign quality. It had never been perfectly related to her, he had felt ; but he had not imagined how much it concealed—not physically, perhaps ; though the rich masses of her hair were an agreeable surprise to him. He had merely not thoroughly reckoned with the intense, ample individuality which her cap, and kerchief, and austere gray gown had quelled.

He could not fancy one feeling free to utter one's self in such a costume in the midst of a carnival. It must react upon the wearer, as the priestly robes do, without reference to surroundings ; and surely her surroundings had not been an encouragement to any form of suppleness. As he observed her, sitting where a single shaft of the keen morning sun fell upon the light brown of her hair, it seemed to him that her close-fitting black gown, with its hints of worldly taste, the dainty little collar which had replaced the neckerchief, and the uncovered head about which the breeze hovered and played, were the symbols of her emancipation, as her former garb had been the symbol of her bondage. The sun-ray which sought her out from the east end of the portico, was the informing light which had come to her. Perhaps one might even imagine the breeze which sported about her head the liberal atmosphere in which she was henceforth to walk.

Certainly she looked, despite the vague air of sadness

which now always accompanied her, a creature pre-eminently at one with the stirring, eager, zestful world. She was so natural a figure in it, now that he saw her there, that March said to himself she had never been more than exiled from it.

"Yes," said Mr. Echols, in answer to a question from March, "fairly old. We are not very good at the ancient on this side; we've not been at it long enough. But we can show excellent century, century and a-half mansions—that matter," he pursued, in his laconic, facile way, with a faint wave of his hand.

Mr. Echols had a kind of grace uncommon with men. His movements were harmonious; his gestures had a smooth, undulating ease. When he talked he leaned his head slightly forward, without bending his body, in a way that was indefinitely suggestive of a compliment to the person with whom he spoke. His lips wore the inveterate phantom of a smile.

"Of course it's not a fair race for antiquity with you English. I don't know that we care to enter for it. Though, Mr. March, there are the Indians. There's a point or two there—Behring Strait and that. If you don't bar them, there is certainly something to be said. Japan now—that theory, you know. If we are trying for age we must rely upon the Indian. I've often thought that. That's why it's a pity to treat him as we do. He ought to be kept in a guarded treasury with the other archives, instead of being exterminated. That is like the college of heralds sending out commissioners to cut down the genealogical trees. I'm in favor of leaving them standing. It's true Indian genealogy isn't first-rate, but it's all we've got."

Mr. Echols asked March about his plans, and they all

listened with interest as he told how he had brought over and established his colony. He admitted that it had not been easy. He was not absolute head of the company, and there had been some differences. His design of combining a large number of farm laborers and small farmers with the gentlemen colonists for whom he had made his first explorations had not been found to be a perfectly simple affair. But, as this had been his chief point in the entire matter, he had urged it. In the end he had gained his wish, and all were enviably content now.

"Feudal—a kind of small feudal system you are establishing over there," said Mr. Echols. "I trust you won't find it necessary to call your vassals out to render military service."

"I think you are the nearest baron," returned March. "I hope you won't make me fight."

"No, I think I prefer to claim as tenant in free and common socage, and when I use my right of piscary I shall send you up some fish out of your own brook as rent."

"It is a kind of conspiracy your uncle is getting up," said March, speaking to Constance for the first time.

The daintiest flush fled through her cheeks. She had been observing him directly as he turned toward her, and summoning before her memory the picture of a certain memorable scene with the unsolicited retinue of thoughts which always accompanied it. She looked down with a consciousness almost perfectly new to March's experience of her before responding.

"You will find it wonderfully harmless," she said, at length, with her head lifted to its usual firm poise. She let fall upon him her serene and gently confident glance.

Mrs. Echols suggested that Jacinth and Constance introduce Mr. March to the beauties of the lake. Mr. Echols ordered his horse and chaise to drive his son and himself to town, and Lincoln joined the party which, in obedience to Mrs. Echols's proposal, presently sauntered over the lawn toward the boat house.

Lincoln, who had the kind of faculty with young ladies which, like purer forms of genius, is probably born with its possessor, by a delightful bit of management secured Miss Jacinth to himself, and left March to push off in one of the other skiffs with Constance. This was by no means a disagreeable arrangement, but it gave March an odd thrill. He felt a strange reluctance now that the moment had come to meet her so intimately. It had the charms of a voyage of discovery, this little row, but it had also its uncertainties. He knew no one to whom he occupied so peculiar a relation. Fortunately few such incidents as that which distinguished his acquaintance with Constance had come in his way. He remembered that they had in fact scarcely met since their most singular excursion to the cemetery. The brief colloquy at the supper table on the same evening had been rendered impersonal by a sad necessity. Now, however, they would encounter without interposing media of any sort.

Probably no impassivity that may be assumed at future meetings ever sufficiently defends a man who has fruitlessly offered marriage to a woman ; and with March the consciousness of a proposition which had committed him to a definite view of their relation was very present at the moment. This view had been perfectly frank and sincere, but it will be confessed that his position in consequence of it was not without its embarrassing features. His proposal to her had been in the way of a gentleman's

obligation. It had seemed to him at the time obviously proper, and it had certainly been the only thing sufficiently in the nature of reparation for the sad trouble his presence in Judea had unconsciously caused her. But it must clearly affect their intercourse now that they had met again.

It is to be added that his speculations touching the change which he vaguely saw in her, and, more distinctly guessed, had reached the point at which he was both eager to satisfy himself and reluctant to know all that there might be to learn. It was plain that she was scarcely at all the young girl he had known. But the difference was not certainly advantageous. There had been great opportunities in the half year or so since he had seen her. She had been through a crucial trial. She had entered on a wholly new life. How had it left her? On the whole, as has been intimated, his attitude was one of faith. But on various scores he entered the boat with misgiving.

On her part, Constance was not without a sense of the situation.

CHAPTER XV.

THE lake sat in a dense, even circle of green. The pines, oaks, maples, beeches and chestnuts left wide aisles in their ranks for one who walked among them ; but on the further side of the sheet of water they presented a solid bank of green, scantily touched in the late September by the modest pigments with which the un-eager Autumn paints the southern woods. It is only in the positive North and indubitable South that Nature uses all her color box ; the half-way house is not her favorite. The tree tops sloped to the fringe of shrubs which on every side saw their obeisance mirrored in the tranquil water. The house was not visible from the lake, which, indeed, had an indescribable effect of remoteness and solitude.

Lincoln had pushed out and rounded the bend beyond the boat-house before the other boat was launched, and his skiff was not in sight when March pulled out into the lake. It was one of the perfect days which glorify the Autumn everywhere. The air was soft and perhaps faintly warm. One did not know. It certainly was not cool. The vaguest and most respectful breeze imaginable made its effect, like a true artist, without obtrusion. It embroidered itself upon the water in a lacework as fine as a cobweb. The sun had forgotten its vicious habit of heat and shed now only a glow to make the heart glad. In the way the painter evolves from his model, his observations of a thousand women, and his imagination

of what one woman should be, the perfect figure that we know, the day seemed, to an admirable pattern, to have added its memories of all the gentle days that ever were, and illumined it all with its own graceful fancies of the day that might be. A silence which nothing broke but the mewing of a catbird and the mournful note of the crows that from time to time flapped above the boat toward their perch across the lake seemed to have taken possession of the world ; and the loitering clouds looked down on it all out of their stainless cup of blue.

March pulled vigorously down the lake for a few moments ; then, bringing the skiff gradually about, directed it toward a point upon the further shore at which a line of alders leaned out over the water as if seeking the embrace of sisters that never came. It was pleasantly cool in their shade, and when he had reached it he let the boat drift and sat with his knee in his hands looking absently past Constance, who sat in the stern. They had exchanged the necessary words at the boat-house ; but a silence had fallen upon them since they set out.

" We ought to have some experiences to exchange," said March, at length, smiling musingly.

" I don't know where we should begin," returned the girl.

" Has so much happened ? "

" Everything ! Nothing seems ever to have happened before. I believe you are the most recent occurrence."

" Indeed ! I supposed I had been happening a long time."

" You have come back. I did not think you would come back."

" You underrated my interest."

"You seem to believe in us," she said. "As I told you once, such faith seems very generous. But I never supposed you would give it such practical form."

"I hope you approve."

"I can't tell you how much I have thought of it. If those people were as wretched as you used to tell me, it must be a great thing for them. Even for the better class it is such an opening, I should think. A woman can't know much about these things, of course. But it seems wise and good—very good. It is the kind of work I should like to do."

March's eyes kindled.

"You don't know how glad you would make me if you could," he said. "A woman's hand—the hand of a strong, clear-sighted woman—is exactly our present need. You see, the men brought their families, and now, until we can get the houses built, there is such perplexity—such a host of those little hourly vexations that draw upon the force which ought to go into the project itself, as I can't begin to tell you."

"And you think I could help you?"

"You would be invaluable, Miss Van Cleef. There is an infinite number of difficulties that only a woman can smooth. You would see them at once. They would not be hard, I think, to you. The poor women are not used to your American ways, and, living as they are obliged to, yet, half in bivouac, their trials seem to them very considerable. Yes, you could do a great deal. You see that I am taking you very much at your word."

"You are very good. I am sure I did not wish to be taken at anything less. You don't know what a prospect you open to me!"

"I hope I don't open too much hard work."

"Whatever it costs I am sure I shall enjoy it. I have my little charities in Quinnimont, but they leave me abundance of time. And, if you will let me, I can't think where I should find more pleasure than in employing it in that way."

She leaned her elbows on her lap and clasped her hands thoughtfully before her. Finally she looked up with a little smile.

"Perhaps my enthusiasm seems strange to you. You don't remember my concerning myself much about these things?"

"You were always very good."

"Yes, I think I meant to be. But it was a poor goodness, I am afraid, with superficial roots. It never accomplished anything. It spent its time in intending fairly well. Perhaps it is not much better yet, but I hope I have bought some experience."

"I trust it has not been too expensive."

She smiled sadly.

"I suppose I paid the market price. It doesn't often fall, I believe."

"No; though the supply is always so much larger than the demand, I'm afraid we shall never be wise enough to buy it cheaply. If there is ever an improvement I hope it will be in putting it on sale in the second-hand shops."

"Yes, it seems sad that we can't get it at some one's else expense. They are always offering it at bankrupt sales," smiled she. "Ah, if I could have taken what my father offered, what his whole life seemed to say!"

"Perhaps it has come to you since. It has not ceased to be good."

March pulled aimlessly at the oars.

"*Since!* Ah, since!"

"As you say, a great deal has happened."

"So much!"

March took up the oars and pulled for two or three hundred yards. He stopped before a tiny cascade which whitened the face of a moss-tufted slope of rock. The falling water made a cooling sound with its shivering, rustling slip over the stone; it found its way into the lake by a tortuous channel, and they fancied, as they looked over the boat's side, that they could see where the lake drank it in below the surface, and that its coming made the water clearer.

"I have not liked to say how much I have felt for you in your affliction," he said, briefly.

"You must know that I can't thank you for the kindness that made things so much easier at the time. I didn't know of it until afterward, and you did not give me an opportunity to express my feeling."

"It was not entirely in my choice," he answered to the mild reproach in her tone.

"Yes, they have told me. I am so sorry," she said, frankly.

"We had not known each other very well, I am afraid. Perhaps we should have remained a little distant in spirit if things had been different. But he was my brother. It was very bitter."

"It must have put new difficulties in the way of your American plan," said Constance.

"Yes, it did not make my father more willing to let me leave home. He has never more than yielded to my project."

"But you will go back?"

"After a while—yes."

"Your unfortunates have their claims, but they have not all the claims, I suppose."

"No, but I must see them settled. There are a great many things to be done yet. I'm ploughing up the ground, so to speak."

"I trust you will gather a large crop," she returned, smiling.

March pulled slowly over to the boat-house and put up the skiff. Constance, as she walked up the path, was reflecting upon the possibilities of effective charity which his proposition discovered to her imagination. It would be the fortunate sort of work from which one saw direct returns. It was like doing a small tradesman's business and casting up one's profits at the end of the day to a cent.

Constance was not without the weakness of her sex for material facts. A pound that one could see and handle was better than a ton which one could only fancy. She had a despairing feeling about some of her work that it was like dropping stones into a pool. Doubtless it filled it up, but she feared that she should not live to see the water perceptibly displaced. She tried to have faith, and the infirmity which led her to long for visible results was far from the poor lust that they might be seen of men. But she could not help desiring to see them herself. In the work which March proposed to her at Gerrit she hoped to be able to use her orderly broom, so to speak, and to see the dust fly, and she tried to humble her confidence—after a habit which had not been familiar to her some months before—that she was capable of this missionary undertaking.

March was thinking of the evidences of the change in her of which his fancy had given him hints. The lumin-

ous and far-reaching nature of it was a kind of scandal to his recent doubts of its character. The question whether it was a gain was like an inquiry whether foliage was an addition to a tree. It seemed a perfectly relevant adornment. It sprang as naturally from the original substance of her character as leaves in Spring drink the sap waiting their use and leap out upon the sleeping branches.

The two were amply occupied with these thoughts as they went up toward the house, and there appeared to be a tacit understanding between them that their acquaintance was intimate enough to warrant the long silence which neither was inspired to break until they reached the piazza steps.

"It is arranged, I believe, Mr. March," said Constance, "that you and Mr. Lincoln are to spend the night, so that you have time for anything. Do you want to help me get some peaches?"

March professed his eagerness, and when she had gone in and found a basket she explained to him, as they walked around the house and into the garden, that she meant the fruit for an invalid, to whom she would take it when she drove to Quinnimont next morning.

"You know you are going out to Gerrit to-morrow," said March.

She smiled.

"How should I know it?"

"I had hoped you would guess I should want you."

"You put too much faith in my imagination."

"I trust I don't rely too much on its friendliness to the project now that it is before you. Should you like to see the place?"

He wished to hear her say it.

"Of all things," she answered, quietly, with genuine wishfulness. "I will have the peaches sent into town."

When they came to the tree he took hold of a low-growing branch and shook it quickly. A shower of the rosy-faced fruit fell about them.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to climb it, Mr. March," she said. "I suppose I might give Mrs. Jewett the bruised ones, for she doesn't see any kind often, but they look so much more tempting when they are perfect, and she is not well."

March swung himself readily into the tree. It was rather high for a peach tree, and he mounted to a perch among the upper branches before he found a point from which he could reach the finest fruit. Then as he began to pick, Constance suggested that he had forgotten the basket. He looked about him.

"I'm rather too well placed to come down," he said. "Suppose—would you mind holding your dress? I will toss them into it."

Constance laughed.

"I suppose that is the least I can do, since you sacrifice your dignity to climb a tree for me."

She caught up the corners of her skirt the least bit and kneeling down, looked up at him with a delicious laugh. She held the skirt far out in a tight clutch, and retracted her form with a pretty timidity from the net which she stretched before her. March sat looking down upon this graceful picture for a moment before dropping the peach in his hand into her skirt. She averted her head while she waited fearfully for the fall of the fruit. The gentle curves of her throat were turned up to him, and the admirable lines of her figure were thrown into relief. She had never looked so pretty to him.

"Dear me!" She glanced up. "I'm quite ready," she said.

She drew back her head quickly as a large peach came through the air. It gave a little shock to her hands as it fell into the hollow of her skirt. She looked up again as she took it out and put it into her basket.

"You look as if you were afraid they would hit you," said March, laughing. "I shall be careful."

"Yes, but make haste," returned she, with a faint blush.

He went on rapidly and she had presently filled her basket.

March found an agreeable worldliness in her manner. He did not know why, but he could not imagine this episode happening in Judea.

As he left the whist table that evening to go to his room with Lincoln, having endeared himself to Mr. Echols by beating him the rubber, in company with Constance, he repeated to himself that she was decidedly not the young lady he had known.

CHAPTER XVI.

CARRIAGES were considered a kind of effeminacy about Quinnimont, and the party which set out for Gerrit the next morning, at March's invitation, was in the saddle, save Mr. and Mrs. Echols, who drove in a chaise. Constance, Jacinth, Helen, and Ethel were mounted, and the company went down the shaded carriageway at an easy trot. The air had a fresh, new minted feeling, and glowed and glistened in the morning sun. The dew shone upon the cobwebs in the stubble of the fields they galloped by, and the hollows of the mountains were draped with mist. The meadows—freaked by black dots, which were heaps of seed clover when one came to look—stretched fair in the young light on every hand. The golden rod was rubbing its eyes and looking up as the morning warmed itself; the choke and elderberries were shedding jewelled tears. It was a morning in which to be glad of life, and, with a lithe horse under one, there was no reason why one should not find his condition at least an excellent imitation of content.

March asked Constance for a gallop, and giving their horses rein, they left the party for one of those wild flights which, it is to be supposed, are dear to men for the momentary surrender to the latent animal in us all. Constance's cheeks were carnation and her eyes glistened as they turned and let their horses take them back at a walk to rejoin the company. Lincoln and Jacinth swept by

them, and Constance watched them disappear as if she were thinking of their progress. Then she turned to March with,

"I have been thinking of what you said yesterday, and talking to aunt of it. It seems to her an excellent idea. She is anxious to assist."

"She is very kind," said March. "I could not have expected such sympathy."

"Indeed, I think everyone who understands your aim must wish to help you. It is no credit to them. But what I wanted to say was—I don't know that I can say it either."

"Don't try."

"Yes, I think I will. It's that if I do anything at Gerrit I want to feel that I have a right to do it and a reason—a good, *practical* reason."

"Surely——" March began.

"You don't understand. You would say that charity—doing what I can for fellow-creatures who chanced to be less fortunately placed than I—was reason enough. I admit it ought to be, and, of course, that is what draws me to it. But I feel the obligation upon me to prove my right to exist, if you understand." She glanced at him hesitatingly. "I have a great longing to relate myself to the suffering people that one sees everywhere about. They are a perpetual reproach, and their faces seem always to be asking how I dare—how anyone dare—build a wall about oneself and live only for the interesting things. They *are* interesting! Oh, they are! And that is the trouble. They allure me even after I fancy I have come out from behind my wall and gone down a little among their wants. And so I would like to secure my interest in this by a good, sordid tie. Mr. March, I think

you must go with me far enough to comprehend—it's true it isn't perfectly intelligible—but you won't make fun of me, and will you let me be a stockholder?"

March did not laugh, but he said with smiling sympathy which was as grateful to her as assent for the moment,

"In Gerrit? Why, it isn't a stock company exactly, Miss Van Cleef."

"I know. But somehow you can let me have a share—a money share in it. I didn't explain it all. It would be a curb upon my pretensions—like some one standing by all the time and smiling pityingly on them. That is what I need—something to humble me. It is like—but I can't make myself clear. It must seem great nonsense."

"On the contrary, if you will let me say it, it's great wisdom. But, Miss Van Cleef, Gerrit is only an experiment. If we had opened books and our stock were for sale I shouldn't like you to risk anything upon our success."

"You believe it will succeed, don't you?" she asked, quickly.

"Certainly. But I should dislike to feel that any one was hanging anything on that belief. No, Miss Van Cleef; wait until we begin to declare dividends and then we shall want to present some of the stock, if there is any, to our Lady Bountiful."

"You don't understand. I have some money that doesn't belong to me."

"The more reason——"

"No, it belongs to no one else. I hold it in trust. There are some unpaid bequests of my father on which the interest has been accumulating."

"Indeed ! I had an impression Mr. Keator said that your father's estate, with the exception of some small legacies to his sisters, went to you."

"It did. But there are things that I knew he would like to have done. I have promised Mr. Keator to build him a new hospital at Judea, and—you remember telling me of the poor people in the West Indies? I have decided to make a permanent fund for the support of a Moravian missionary there."

"You have done a capital thing. I can't tell you how glad I am." After a pause : "But, perhaps, you have taken my word too implicitly. There may be—I suppose there must be places where the need is greater."

"Isn't it enough if we do what seems a good thing? We are not bound to hunt out the best thing."

They met the party, and, turning, they all cantered on. From time to time as he rode beside Constance, March glanced curiously at her. She seemed finely in accord this morning with the world to which she had said she longed to relate herself ; she appeared to have her fingers on its pulse, and her breath came and went in tune to all the life about them. She looked in every direction as she rode with joyous inconsequence. Her eyes honored each perfection of the perfect autumn morning as their course opened before them, and her head moved about with the nervous liveliness of a bird's, while her lips wore a satisfied smile. Sometimes she galloped forward a little, and March watched fondly her even, graceful rise and fall in the saddle, with her body bent slightly forward as if fearful that some of the morning might escape her.

The company paused upon a hill to await the chaise which their rapid riding had left behind. The emi-

nence rose out of a blooming valley—the valley in which Quinnimont was. Along its slopes the earth lay fallow, expectantly turning its face to the sun. In a field near, where the long creases of the plough had been levelled, the process of sowing went on. Down in the bottoms the corn waved and rustled in banks of green and yellow. The barnyards were rich with the sere evidences of harvest, and from among the clustering buildings of a farmstead on the knoll beyond came the sound of the smart, rhythmic tapping of flails. In the meadows where the stubble lingered undisturbed by the plough, the weeds and clover were making haste to green over the bristling sticks, and an oily ether, such as a stove exhales, danced and palpitated above them. The birds twittered from the trees, and sang joyously as they swam through the sun-lit air. The grasshoppers went with their nimble, ceaseless leaps among the clover, sounding their little harpstrings as they hopped from covert to covert.

“It is the autumn ! It is the autumn !” they seemed to say. “This is our last dance. They will turn the lights out presently.”

And the bastard daisies, the pink yarrow, the golden rod, the yellow snapdragon, the occasional tardy clover heads and belated dandelions that fringed the roadside, seemed filled with the prophetic thought and drank eagerly all the sunshine they could find ; while the maples and sumachs, the Virginia creeper and the blackberry vines running along the stone walls were pranking themselves in gay reds, determined that the season should go out in a blaze of glory, though their ball dresses cost them their existence.

Gerrit lay in the next valley, beyond the mountain which faced Quinnimont, and when the chaise came

up, March and Constance pressed on to the clambering road which made a way to their destination through the hills. The road attacked the mountain by a brave steep at first, then wound artfully about it, snatching an advantage where it could and lifting itself to the summit.

When they had climbed the long hills, they rode along the levels at a swinging trot, and on the frequent inclines dropped the rein upon their horses' necks and let them take what gait they would. As they came from time to time upon a clearing, they caught dissolving views of the fertile valley below, at which Constance refused to look, keeping the sensation untasted until it could be known in its entirety. The fresh light of the sun, not yet five hours old, fell softly on the tree-tops, and the lower branches made wide nets to take it on their various greens. It was prettiest where the saplings and succulent young growths grew so dense that the brightness difficultly sifted through the boughs—by the maples and chestnuts only knew what indirections. The woodpeckers were beating their reveille, and this, with the hum of the bees, the chattering of orioles and the steady hoof-falls were often the only sounds that broke the stillness as they stooped under a wild grapevine, or contented their eyes with the graces which the sunshine wrought in the woods.

March told Constance as they rode of the constitution of Gerrit and his hopes for its success. He said that it was not a commune except in the best sense, that is, that every man had a common interest although property was separate.

"Our aim is modest enough. We do not hope to revolutionize the world ; we do not think this the only way, but only one convenient way, or an experiment

toward it, and so we don't compassionate the remainder of mankind, nor attempt to proselyte them. There are a thousand needs, and we are groping toward an answer to only one of them. Bringing these people across the water and placing them here—I am thinking of the farmers and farm laborers, who are my chief interest—is merely cutting a path for them. They are together, because it was thought that our end was more easily attained by that method than by scattering them. They are being given a little guiding hand in entering the path, but further than that nothing will be done to assist them. It is simply offering them an opportunity. A plot of ground is assigned to them ; they build their houses themselves out of logs, and they pay for their land by yearly installments out the profits of their crops. The association will buy it back if they should ever wish to leave ; or, if they remain, they can buy out the entire settlement if they can find the money.”

“Some one tells me that the people in Quinnimont have all kinds of fancies about your object. None of them are like that.”

“No ; they imagine that we mean to do away with money and bring back barter, and to force all farmers to live in communities by bringing down the prices of things through co-operation.”

The view from the summit included both valleys. That from which they had come was the more cultivated, but the vale below, in which March pointed out the raw, half-built houses of Gerrit, seemed quite as fertile. Constance glanced over the prospect, which was free to the horizon on all sides. The mountains made a perfect circle, and looked down from every quarter upon the smiling plains, which the gnomes that dwell in volcanoes

had forborne to upheave when the geology of this region was enacting and the hills were lifted to the society of the clouds.

Constance imagined the farm-dotted landscape a chess-board. The square, ploughed fields were the black spots and the green meadows did for the others. She made the stone houses castles, and the ordinary houses went for pawns, the oaks and other portly trees for bishops. When she saw a horse she knighted it. The rare orchards planted in regular rows she liked to fancy acrostics, and to read them up and down and across.

There were several new houses completed at Gerrit, besides the fine old mansion of the revolutionary period, which had been the residence of former owners. The sound of hammering filled the air, and a host of men were hurrying about in their shirt sleeves. Some of the women were washing in front of their embryonic homes, and the cheerful odors of many preparing dinners made their way to the nostrils through the apertures which were one day to be covered with roofs, as well as through the windows.

While he was yet in the saddle March was surrounded by a numerous group of the colonists. One of them announced that certain of the cows had broken pasture ; another said that the corn which they had bought upon their arrival ready planted upon one of their fields, had been touched by frost. A third wanted instructions about shingles, and another offered the information that Jem Carver had not been seen since the night before.

"Drunk, I suppose?" said March.

"Yes, sir, I doubt he is."

"Send him to me when he comes back."

With the other embarrassments he dealt promptly,

giving rapid orders as he alighted and helped his guests to do the same.

Constance asked that she might be allowed to make acquaintance with the women for herself.

"I don't want them to feel that I am a visitor," she said.

March assented with a smile of intelligence, and she gathered up her riding-skirt and walked swiftly over to the first woman she saw. She was washing, and took one of her hands out of the tub to smooth an obstinate strand of hair, while she courtesied with respectful wonder. Constance had taken off her glove and bravely shook her hand. She had gained experience during the last half year, and, by one of the womanly intuitions, had found the common ground upon which alone the ignorant and distressed are successfully met. She neither condescended to them nor pitied them. So far as she sympathized with them she made it seem the natural sympathy of one woman for another, and she surrounded it all with a dignity which asked no more than it gave, and which commonly won their instant and faithful respect. Her charity, however mistaken or ineffective it may have been, at least did not wear its embroidered purse at its waist, nor carry its ointment as a badge and its lint as a flag. It was perfectly unobtrusive, and its methods were certainly eminently vindicated in the case of this woman, from whom she had in ten minutes the story of all her troubles and wants.

The party went about the inchoate settlement under the guidance of March, and Mr. Echols kept his glasses to his eyes and made his observations.

"I suppose I ought to keep up my character as a Southerner, Mr. March, by telling you that shingles are

a great error. I would if I could with any sort of conscience. It's the lingering Connecticut in me. Thatch, you know—thatch is the proper thing. Durable? No, it isn't, and you would have to wait until next summer to cut your straw. But then——. Open roofs are inconvenient? Certainly. But custom—custom, you see, has nothing to do with cold weather."

March said that he intended to clear the forest from the mountain slopes and cultivate them. Mr. Echols asked if he had determined what he would plant upon them, and he owned that he had not.

"You haven't thought of grapes—grapes and peaches? Now, there's southern France—France and Italy. You know where they plant their vineyards? Southern exposure, good slope, plenty of sun, that sort of thing. When I tell our people that about here they hint that I'm not a farmer. In other words, I don't know beans. But grapes—I fancy I know grapes; and I'm glad to find an unprejudiced subject. Try the experiment, Mr. March."

He said many more things in his shrewd, smiling way as they walked about.

Mrs. Echols joined Constance when they encountered her, and went about with her for a time, but presently returned to the party which March was leading back to his own residence.

This ancient dwelling was decorated with a piazza like enough Mr. Echols's to have been the product of the same mould, and when he had seen his visitors seated upon it, March left them in the competent care of Lincoln and went to find Constance. He met her coming out of one of the cottages.

"I hope you have been making excuses for us," he said.

"There is not so much need as I fancied," returned she, "but there are ever so many things to be done. You can't think."

"I've heard," he said, smiling.

They walked slowly toward the house.

"Not the unabridged version," she answered, confidently. "They wouldn't tell it all to a man, even if they could remember it. I can't recall everything myself even now. There is so much—no man could have an idea. I think I shall have to come again and make a list of the things they have. That would be quite simple."

"Come again, anyway," he said.

"Never fear! I shall come often enough. I am greatly interested."

"You can not come too often," said March, earnestly.

"If I can do any good. No."

"I shall like to have you come, you know, whether you do our people here good or not," he said, with a novel feeling thrilling him strangely. "Your coming will always do me good."

His voice took an altogether new tone. He found himself unable to control it. Their talk had always been singularly free from the personal cast, and these words were rich in implication. A fleeting expression halted abruptly on her face, and she glanced quickly toward him. Then she said:

"I suppose you know, Mr. March, that those poor women have no washboards."

CHAPTER XVII.

MARCH stood upon the portico and thoughtfully watched them ride away. Then he came to where Lincoln was sitting and flung himself into a chair beside him. He began to beat the sides of it nervously with his hands.

"What is it, March?" asked Lincoln.

"It's a long story."

"That is what you said yesterday when I asked about Miss Van Cleef's transgression. You remember you were speaking of something of the sort."

"Well, they are the same thing."

Lincoln pulled musingly at his upper lip with his fingers, and looked at his companion.

"You give me credit for a great deal of penetration," he said.

"How's that?"

"I suppose you think I understand. I don't."

March smiled.

"I had no idea you understood. I don't myself."

"Well, then, I don't even understand what you are trying to understand."

"You know that you will. You believe that I can have no reason for refusing to tell you anything worth while."

His face was full of the friendship to which they did not give clearer expression.

"My dear fellow!" exclaimed Lincoln, impulsively, as he grasped his hand.

March told him the story of his relation with Constance. An irresistible need was upon him to set it in a clear light before himself. He wished to understand, if he could, the monstrous blindness which had withheld from him until now the perception that he loved her.

"You see," he said, as he finished, "what a cheap position it leaves upon my hands."

"You couldn't have known."

"No; but I needn't have been an ass."

"I don't see how that is."

"It was gratuitous to tell her, that evening in the cemetery, that I didn't care for her."

"Well, you didn't. You wouldn't have had yourself kneeling and calling the gods to witness, would you?"

"I might have said less. I need not have insisted on my indifference."

"My dear fellow, you are trying to convince me that you made it seem like conferring a favor. You must remember I didn't meet you yesterday."

"Don't, don't, Lincoln! Your friendly imagination makes it worse. That is just what I did."

"Oh, come now!"

"And as if that wasn't bad enough, I've no doubt I showed her that I felt it was the gentlemanly thing."

"Well, it was, and that is where you have got to take your stand."

"It was unnecessary to let her see what prompted me, however you dress up the motive itself. I suppose you admit that."

"See here, March, I don't admit anything. I wasn't there and I don't know what you said, but I am as clear

as though I had taken it down in shorthand that you said nothing ungentlemanly, or that you ought to be repenting of."

"Said ! It was my manner ! She must have thought me a brute."

"I've no doubt she did," returned Lincoln, with unction, "and that is the reason she has treated you with such uncommon consideration ever since. She likes the race."

"Do you think so, Lincoln ? Tell me ; has it seemed so to you ?"

"How do I know ? I don't think she dislikes you."

March rose and walked up and down the portico with nervous strides. He paused suddenly before Lincoln.

"It's a coxcomb's fancy, but I really believe I am not indifferent to her. She lets me do things ; she seems willing I should be with her."

"Well, what more do you want ? You don't expect a girl like that to wear her heart on her sleeve."

"No, no, that's true. I should never know any more than negatively from her manner if I went on until doomsday. She isn't a girl who keeps her mental doors open. That is what I admired in her from the first."

"Yes," said Lincoln, kindly.

He had always felt that it was one of the offices of friendship to listen patiently to the lover's rhapsodies of one's friends.

"And if, as you seem to think, she has forgiven that cruel affront to all her maiden pride, it is only the mercifulness that I have always felt in her."

"I didn't say she forgave it. That isn't the word. She didn't believe you."

"Lincoln !"

"Yes, I mean it. A girl with her intuitions, with her imagination, could not have avoided seeing what you were able to blind yourself to. It's an extremely dull woman who doesn't know when a man is in love with her, and I hope you don't think her one of the exceptions."

"Lincoln, I must tell you that you go a great ways. I didn't say——"

"I know you didn't, but you won't tell me that it wasn't so."

"Oh, I don't know, Lincoln. I have been deceiving myself, of course, in the ingenious lover's fashion. I was just as much in love with her when I left her in Judea as I am now, only I called it by another name. I pretended to myself that I was interested in her curious situation, in her character, in her difficulties with the Church, all that. Dolt that I was! It literally needed another sight of her to put that poor nonsense to flight. But I can't tell when it began. You can't date passion, Lincoln. I don't see how I can say whether I was in love with her or not when I posed for indifference that evening in the cemetery and made her listen to my condescending propositions. How can a man tell when such a feeling rises in him?"

"He can't; but, as I say, a woman can."

"You don't know her. Such unconsciousness, such modesty——"

"Oh, dear, don't fancy I don't know all that. Of course, I only became acquainted with her infinite delicacy yesterday, while you have had the advantage of a life's intimacy, but I thought I had an idea or two about her."

"I've no doubt you have, but you use your imagination."

"My dear March, where is yours? I didn't say that she announced it to herself; she didn't put it on her bulletin board. But you are ready to believe that she might display as much ingenuity as you in cheating herself. Your fancy is probably not so dull that you are unable to think of her as using her sense of your love as an armor to her pride, quite unconsciously."

"And you suppose her not to have been aware of her knowledge? Doesn't that strike you as a little bit too metaphysical?"

"On the contrary, it is one of the simplest things in life, and when you ask her, I think she will tell you so."

"When I ask her? What do you mean?"

"What do *you* mean? I suppose you are going to offer yourself."

March took another turn upon the portico. He came back with his hands thrust gloomily in his pockets.

"You must know that I can't."

"Oh, see here!" cried Lincoln, rising.

"You don't want it explained to you, I trust?"

"Pshaw! March, you can't mean——! Oh! look here!" deprecated the young man.

"You haven't been thinking that I would?"

Lincoln stared at him. He put his hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, I have. It never occurred to me. I thought, of course——"

His protest died upon his lips: he could not find the abundant arguments which a moment before seemed to crowd about him.

"You see, Lincoln, even you can't find a decent defence for it."

"I should like to know who is doing the metaphysical now," he said, sitting down, doggedly.

He put one of his well-dressed legs upon the other and regarded it with fixed disapproval.

"Look at it fairly, Lincoln. How can I tell her that I was mistaken, that once she seemed scarcely worthy to occupy the exalted position of Owen March's wife; but that I have thought better of it, and now see in her some virtues—formerly overlooked—which entirely qualify her? How can I tell her that? But I needn't urge it."

"No, you needn't," admitted Lincoln, "though you overstate it. I'm not blind, and I understand how you feel. Your sentiments are perfectly proper; you could not feel less. But this is one of the cases—they're very rare—in which you ought to sacrifice your proper sentiments. There is something higher concerned. You've no right to trifle with it, it seems to me."

"Don't put temptation in my way, Lincoln. My inclination is strong enough."

"Of course it is, and you may as well yield to it. You don't seem to think of her."

"Excuse me. I had supposed myself to be thinking only of her."

"Do you want me to be frank?"

"Surely."

"Then I should say that your personal pride was at least as much involved as your consideration for her feeling."

"You may be right, Lincoln," owned March, gloomily. "There doesn't seem much chance of my coming out of the thing as a gentleman, in any event."

"Oh, dear me; yes, there is. But there are certainly several opportunities for mistakes. I think you will

make one if you don't take the measures of her feelings on both sides."

"Leave me a shred or two of self-respect. Don't ask me to presume that she is in love with me."

"You might try for her vague sense of it," smiled Lincoln, who was always as ready to laugh at himself as at others. Then after a pause: "The fact is, it *is* awkward. Nothing is to be gained by blinking that. But you have still the right to hear her decision from her own lips. That is every man's due, and you certainly haven't forfeited it. You would be no worse off if she refused you than you are now."

"It would confirm the awkwardness incurably. You seem to forget that. To offer myself in the circumstances is bad enough, but to offer and be refused would be killing."

"Use your fancy hopefully. Suppose she accepts?"

"I can't suppose it."

"Your modesty is absurd."

"Oh, don't adorn me with spurious virtues."

"I don't, but I can't understand your distrust."

March smiled sadly.

"You can understand there being another man."

"No, not in that village," said Lincoln; but he leaned forward a little, interestedly, as March sat down beside him. "Don't cheapen her. She would not concern herself about anything less than the best."

"He is the best. That is my trouble. He has all the virtues."

"But does she love them?"

March studied the back of his hand.

"I don't know. I can only say that for three years they were constantly shown her. I don't see how she

could fail to be attracted by them, backed by his evident passion. They are charming virtues and he is an excellent man. In the circumstances, if she does not love them and him, she ought to."

"Ah, then, you needn't distress yourself. She doesn't—being a woman. I have no doubt she has done the unexpected thing and fallen in love with your vices."

"Very well, then ; I hope I shall be strong enough not to give her the opportunity of telling me so."

"I don't," returned Lincoln, stoutly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the second day following, Constance drove her aunt over to Gerrit in the pony carriage. When they had alighted in the single, noisy street of the settlement she lifted the cushion from the seat and loaded the man who came for the horse with bundles drawn from a mysterious receptacle beneath. March hearing the brisk rumble of her wheels came out. He brought up some of the young gentlemen of the settlement and introduced them to her. She remembered afterward that she had met a tall Mr. Elden, a particularly ruddy Mr. Borough, a Mr. Marvin with an illuminating smile, and a very young Mr. Featherstonaugh who asked her how Quinnimont society ranked. Among these polite fellows there were two sons of earls and the sixth son of a duke, who had accompanied the colonists in search rather of adventure than of gold.

Several who had been made known to her on her previous visit came up and spoke to her smilingly. But the larger part of these young men had been engaged in hunting two days before, and she saw them now for the first time. Mr. Marvin wished to know if she was fond of hunting, and was decorously appalled when she said she knew nothing about it. He assured her that she ought by all means to learn. They did a great deal of it at Gerrit. The duke's son walked with her aunt as they went among the cottages. Mrs. Echols

asked March if he had seen the plan for the tenement cottages in the last issue of the *Architect's Journal*.

"Mr. Echols takes it," she explained. "He fancies himself interested in architecture, you know."

March said he had observed it and found it suggestive. The paper was taken for their reading-room, he added.

"Have you a reading-room?" asked Constance. "We didn't see it."

"We have several things that you have yet to see. There are redeeming features about the place, though we are short of washboards," exclaimed March.

This was said from Mrs. Echols's side.

He had obviously not sought Constance's company, and indeed seemed willing to defend himself from being left to talk with her alone.

March had been grappling with his feeling since his talk with Lincoln, but it did not appear to go down readily before his assault. He constantly said to himself that it was most unpleasant either way. This distressing balance of disagreeable events has not been commonly found a simplification of difficulties. It resulted with March in giving him a great deal to think of. The ladies did not remain long after they had distributed the comforting articles which they had brought with them, but Constance carried away a faint sense of his avoidance of her. This was confirmed upon her next charitable visit to Gerrit, and as March did not call, a vague wonder began to stir in her.

March was cruelly tortured, and he got no consolation from Lincoln. He had been singularly free from the trivial affairs of boyhood and his passion had an overmastering force. It was perfectly plain that he must

abandon the colony if he did not wish to see her. She came with assiduous regularity, and he could only fancy the pleasure he might find in these visits if he could feel at liberty to meet her as another man might.

Lincoln's friendship was offered with a discrimination for which he felt grateful. It was a rich opportunity for the friendly offices, but it might easily have been made too much of. Lincoln went just far enough, and his unfaltering adherence to his original view of the situation was a grateful tower of strength in the midst of March's uncertainty.

Constance drove home one day with her aunt, especially disturbed by his manner. She had fancied at first that she deceived herself, and the impalpability of the change certainly lent it a dubious air. But she was certain now that she saw a change in his manner toward her. The change implied no reproach. Of that much she was certain. On the contrary, it was full of an almost exaggerated, if distant respect. Its constant presumption upon her understanding, its manly, restrained pleading for a suspension of judgment, appealed with a kind of subtle flattery to all her womanly senses, and perhaps this was the reason that she could find no resentment for it in her heart.

The sensitive chords of pride which she felt ought to be stirred seemed to have forgotten their office, and she tried to believe that they had been disused so long by her systematic humbling of herself that a minor temptation could not set them vibrating. But she could not cajole herself so far. She knew that slighter matters had roused the old sentiment, despite the best that her newly-won strength could do, and the certainty that if it were some other than March she would find the appropriate

feeling awake without her summons, broke down this pleasing fancy.

"Aunt, have you noticed a change in Mr. March's manner recently?" she asked, suddenly, as they drove.

Mrs. Echols was silent for a moment, apparently piecing her recollections together.

"I don't know," she answered, slowly, at length. "Have you?"

"I can't tell. I ask you."

"Why, I remember——"

"Yes?"

"I remember very little, dear, but I seem to feel something now that you speak of it."

Constance touched her whip thoughtfully to the pony's flank.

"Yes, that is what makes it hard. One can't say what it is, or even certainly that it is at all, but it's impossible not to feel it."

Mrs. Echols looked musingly at the pony's even, nervous little motions.

"And does it disturb you?" she asked, kindly.

Constance smiled.

"Don't you think it ought?"

"That depends——" Mrs. Echols hesitated an instant.

Constance looked at her questioningly.

"Upon whether I like Mr. March, were you going to say? Certainly I do—greatly. He has been very kind. He was fond of father, I think, and at the time of my trouble he did everything. He rode to Philadelphia—did I tell you?—through a terrible storm for Dr. Fleet, and then afterward made all the dreadful arrange-

ments and went away without a word. Yes, I have every reason to like Mr. March."

It was a cold, dreary day, with the prophetic tang of Winter in the air. The leaves took the wind shiveringly upon their grey backs, and the stacks of corn, cut, and standing in soldierly ranks, seemed glad to hug their comrades close for warmth.

Constance caught her pelisse about her as a colder breeze sprang upon them from the depths of the wood, and pulled the robe over her aunt as that lady said,

"I understand, and it was very good of him. But I was not going to ask you about your feeling toward him. I wanted you to ask yourself whether you had given him cause for offence."

"Offence! Oh, my dear aunt, there is none!"

Constance reflected a moment; then she gave utterance to a thought which was that moment born in her, though she spoke it as if it were immemorially familiar.

"Don't you see that he is withholding himself from some generous idea that it is the part of delicacy not to approach me?"

Mrs. Echols looked at her rather blankly, and tucked the robe about her matronly form before she said,

"I'm bound to say that I don't, but I'm willing to believe that you see, my dear girl, and are not wrong—only it would be right interesting from your point of view to understand a little more clearly. Go over the history of your acquaintance. What is there that could have brought this about? Perhaps you will think, if you run through it carefully. Tell it to me, dear, if it will help you."

Constance listened to this kindly logic in silence.

"Get up, Lady!" she admonished her pony, and gave

her an urgent little tap. "It would take a long time," she said, at length. "Somehow a great many events are associated with Mr. March. It would be hard to give you a fair idea of some of them, and one—ah! it's too awful!"

"Don't, dear, don't! Forgive me! I didn't know I was laying old sores bare. I couldn't let you tell me now."

Constance kept her eyes resolutely fixed on the road in advance.

"But if you thought it might help me?" she said, through her compressed lips.

Mrs. Echols leaned over and kissed her for answer, and Constance did not wait for other invitation to tell her story.

"And then what do you suppose he did?" exclaimed she, when she had told of Mr. Keator's warning, of her obstinacy, which she did not attempt to palliate in any way, and of the never-to-be-forgotten scene in the church.

"I don't know, I'm sure," was Mrs. Echols's expectant answer.

"You would scarcely imagine. It was not like what every other man would do, and yet as he did it you could not conceive that any gentleman would do anything less. Fancy, dear aunt! He proposed to me! After being scorned and upbraided in that public way, after having fallen to what seemed to me the lowest depths, he asked me to marry him. I never knew anything finer."

"What did you say?"

"What could I say? I couldn't accept him very well, could I?"

"That depends upon how you felt toward him."

"It seemed to me that it rather depended upon the feeling which prompted him. At all events, I had no feeling toward him to inquire into. You can fancy a man's being a great deal to one and nothing to one, can't you, aunt? I'm sure you can. That is the feeling, or lack of feeling, I had for Mr. March. He was an extremely agreeable friend, and now he was an extremely kind one. I had never thought of him in that way."

"So you refused him?"

"Certainly; and my belief was justified. He urged his suit as eagerly as if he had really desired his success—for the moment perhaps he did wish it. It was very generous. But he accepted the answer quietly. He had simply felt that it was the gentlemanly thing to do—that was it. He had said that he could not pretend a passion."

"Did he say that?"

"Not those words. He said that he was not in love. Why? Ah, aunt, you didn't fancy that he was?"

"I don't know. But—why, don't you see, my child?"

"No," returned Constance, slowly fixing her wandering eyes on Mrs. Echols's face.

"But I won't say it—or rather I will, but another time. I shall have to think. You will be patient with me for a little, dear?"

"Patient!" cried Constance, impulsively. "Lock your fancy in a box and throw it into the Potomac, aunt! I shall never ask you!"

She put her free arm about her.

Jacinth was absorbedly poking the fire as they walked in upon her and a servant, apparently by her direction, was fetching a monstrous log.

"I thought I would have it warm for you," she said, as she turned to nod to them with the tongs in her hand. "Isn't it very cold out?"

Helen, the elder of the two younger girls, came up to Constance before she could draw off her pelisse.

"Oh, *please* open this!" she begged, holding out a long, worn official paper covered with erasures and directions, and bearing a number of English stamps. "It came this morning just after you went, and it has taken heaps of patience not to open it. Ethel says it looks as if there were a whole romance sealed up in it. Do you see where they have crossed your father's name out and written yours, and then it has gone to Quinnimont, Vermont, instead of Maryland? The 'Md.' isn't very plain," she went on, putting her finger on it as Constance took the packet; "but their eyesight must have been mighty poor to have sent it away up to Vermont. It's the title deeds to some great estate in England, Cousin Constance; that's what it is. I wonder I hadn't thought of that. And you have been kept out of it by some wicked man who has repented on his death-bed and left you even more than your share. That is the way it goes in the story books."

She talked very rapidly, the words jostling and leaping over one another like stones tumbling down hill. Her vivacious manner was not altogether southern, but she had her mother's rich tone and pronunciation and a large store of the hearty southern idioms.

"Perhaps," she began, "but please open it, Cousin Constance!" she begged. "It's mighty interesting."

Constance threw her pelisse and hat upon the chair and sat down before the fire. Her cheeks were glowing from the drive, and in her eyes the mild excitement of

curiosity shone as she broke the seal in her leisurely manner with her penknife.

She gave a low exclamation.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Echols, gently; but she read on.

She folded up the papers at length. Her hands fell into her lap, and for a moment she sat musing. Finally she looked up and said, as if in answer to her aunt,

"You know father amused himself by writing letters to a London newspaper?"

"No, dear——"

"Yes, after we went to Judea he needed some distracting occupation. He was glad to get back, but he missed the city, too, and he enjoyed writing. I used to be so glad of it, and this letter is to say that he was replaced before his death. His political ideas were the ideas of his generation. He often said that, and he would add, in his generous way, that perhaps it was time he gave place to new blood. But to think it had happened and he never knew it!"

"Why, how was that, Cousin Constance?" asked Ethel.

The young girl had drawn a cricket to her side, and, resting her elbows upon Constance's lap, was looking eagerly into her face.

"That is the strangest part of it. You see, aunt," she said, bending forward to show her the paper, while Ethel sat upright upon her cricket, "this would not have reached father before——" She brushed her eyes quickly. "It was mailed too late even if it had come directly. It was not the compassion of chance. It seems to have been only the most perfect human forbearance. It's not very clear to me yet. I ought to understand.

After a while, I suppose, I shall. But—ah, that must have been Mr. March's real errand!" she exclaimed to herself, "and we did not know."

She sat meditating for a moment, and they all waited with a kind of respect for her thought.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Echols, after what seemed a long time.

"Mr. March has done us all an even greater kindness than I knew."

"Do you mean——?"

"Yes, aunt," returned she, with decision. "These papers make that clear." She ran her eyes hastily over one of them again. "I can't doubt it. The dates show it. When Mr. March came to us in April he carried with him a commission for the place which father held. We can only imagine how he avoided assuming it, but at least he made no motion toward it, and except for this we should not have known."

"He must have resigned," suggested Helen, whose ears had not been closed. "Wasn't it splendid of him!"

"And he never said a word!" exclaimed Ethel, ardently.

These young ladies were at the interesting period of life in which a hero is a necessity. March seemed for the moment to serve their purpose excellently.

Constance was silent. She was thinking gratefully of his infinite generosity.

"I should like greatly to thank him," she said, after a time.

CHAPTER XIX.

SHE had an opportunity to thank him on the morrow, for he came over to Quinnimont to assist in preparing the hall, which served as the theatre of the place, for a little play arranged to take place that evening. But she did not see him when she reached the hall; he was engaged behind the scenes no doubt. And she found herself glad of the delay, for she began to wonder how she should approach the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

March and Lincoln had come in early from Gerrit with several of the laboring colonists, and at the time of Constance's arrival, March was engaged with one of the colonists in moving some scenes under the direction of Mrs. Echols. The performance was to be for the benefit of the charitable society which had occupied much of Constance's attention during her stay in Quinnimont, and she naturally found much to do on this morning of the event. She had not been moved to offer to take part in the comedietta which a number of young people slightly known to her had been engaged in rehearsing for a week or two. She had doubted her talent for acting, and besides, had just begun to busy herself at Gerrit when the project of the play was set on foot. But she was much interested in the affair as likely to help on her charitable work in Quinnimont; and went about now, helping actively where she could.

Lincoln was on the stage assisting in the decoration of a booth necessary in the play. As several of the charming young ladies of Quinnimont were also engaged upon this work, the task was not disagreeable to him. Constance observed him amusedly, balanced on a high step-ladder and chatting merrily with the group of feminine assistants below. They handed him tacks and hammer and flowers and paper as he needed them, and seemed to find him a delightful assistant. Jacinth sat a little apart sewing quietly upon the long breadths of a cambric curtain to be used elsewhere in the room, and when Lincoln had accomplished his labors upon the step-ladder he came down and sat beside her, talking while she worked. From time to time he was summoned by the nervous little band of workers at the booth, whose chief difficulty seemed to be the irremediable vagrancy of a pair of highly necessary scissors; but he always returned to Jacinth when he had supplied their demands.

Constance was busy in the hall itself, where presently she found herself in need of a large silver vase which Mrs. Bartlett had promised to bring to be filled with flowers. It was to crown a bit of decoration which Constance had planned to clothe a corner of the bare hall. Mrs. Bartlett had placed her vase in the fly gallery above the stage, where a number of articles had been left for safe keeping. Constance went for it herself, as Mrs. Bartlett could not leave her work. She climbed the steep stairs leading up among the flies, and then remembered that Mrs. Bartlett had not said on which side of the stage she had left the vase. It occurred to her that the hiding-place had been selected a little too ingeniously.

Wherever Mrs. Bartlett had placed it, apparently it

was not where she was, and she walked upon the bridge that spanned the stage. It looked fairly secure while the gallery floor was under her, but when she found herself out upon the slender way with nothing beneath but the dusty, painted borders and the lines of candles before them, she felt frightened at her daring. She looked across to the opposite gallery for which she had set out. It seemed an awful distance. She glanced down at the stage and drew her head back quickly with a little shiver. It was twenty feet beneath her. She tried to rebuke her fears, to reason with herself. The void below might as well have been fathomless. She tried to turn and retrace her steps. She felt a wild fear taking possession of her. Ordinarily she was far from timid, but as she tried to turn on the narrow space with no rail for support, she could not avoid looking below and an unwilling cry escaped her. She remembered afterward how clearly she had seen every thing—the men hammering on the stage, her aunt filling a vase with golden rod, Mrs. Bartlett regarding the decorations, on which she was working, with arms akimbo, Helen and Ethel arranging a rug on the stage—yellow and grey and blue—the very drooping fringe of tallow about the candles in the flies. Then some one seemed to look up from the stage and perceive her, and March came bounding up the stairs.

“Wait a minute, Miss Van Cleef,” he said, and started upon the bridge.

“No, no,” she begged, in a voice which she tried hard to control; “it’s not safe!”

“Oh, yes, I think it is,” said March, with a reassuring smile; but his face was pale.

He took another step.

“Oh, don’t, don’t! Please don’t!”

"Very well," returned he, as he retired to the gallery. "Try it alone," he said, kindly, as he stood waiting for her.

"I can't. I think——"

"Well?"

"I think I could do it now if you won't watch me."

March promptly turned his back. He waited for a full minute. There was no sound. She was still hesitating as he looked about, and without speaking he went quickly out on the bridge, and taking her hand, while he moved backward himself, drew her gently but firmly in. She sank upon a theatrical battered gilt throne which had been stowed in a corner of the gallery, and throwing an arm over the back, let her face fall upon it. Her closed eyes were turned from March, but after a moment or two she looked up with a weary smile. He was regarding her anxiously.

"How silly!" she breathed.

"Do you think so? It seemed to me very natural. You ought not to have attempted it."

"Of course. I know. But Mrs. Bartlett put her vase here and I came to look for it."

"Her vase? Isn't this an odd place for it?"

"No; she was afraid of the boys who are running about the hall; and then, I suppose, she thought it might be stolen. But perhaps she has hidden it a little too carefully. I don't see it. Do you?"

"I suppose it's on the other side. Did she specify?"

"I didn't ask. I didn't know there were two sides when I started."

"But there is a stair leading up to the opposite gallery. It's not easy to understand why you didn't come down and take that."

"Oh, yes, it is if you are acquainted with me. It was my pride. I thought I could do it."

"You know they raise and lower the curtain from the other gallery, and that is where most things employed up here are kept," said March, not accepting the opportunity to discuss her foibles. "This side is used very little."

"I didn't know," said Constance.

"Was your vase a large silver one decorated in gold? I think I saw something like that when I went into the opposite gallery for Mrs. Echols. She is also using it for a store-room."

Constance said that he had probably seen the object of her search, and he went quickly across the bridge and presently returned with it.

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed, "and let me thank you now too for rescuing me. I've scarcely recovered from my fright yet and I had forgotten. How did you know?"

"You gave a little cry, you remember, and I was just below at work on the scenery."

"Were you? I didn't see you. Sit down, Mr. March, if you can find a seat. I'm not half ready to move yet."

She looked at him smilingly. Her amiability was hard to bear. He turned away with a disturbed face to find a chair. He discovered one of those plain wooden chairs, painted white, which, in rural theatres, are the property man's concession to the classical repertoire. One of the legs had been broken half way up, and the other three had been sawed to correspond with this infirmity. March sat down with his hands clinched as if he were restraining himself.

"I shan't keep you long, and with the scenery waiting

I shouldn't venture to keep you at all for a purely selfish purpose ; but, Mr. March, I've found you out."

She enjoyed his startled look.

"I've tracked one of your secret, underhand, generous acts to its lair," she went on, smilingly, "and I mean to bring it out into the light of day and make it pay the penalty of concealment. One would think you were ashamed of your modest virtues. Oh, Mr. March," she cried, changing her tone, "it was too bad of you never to let me know what you had done for father !"

March flushed a little and looked attentively at his outstretched palm.

"I was glad to conceal it," he said. "It wasn't a thing to be proud of. I have never forgiven myself for accepting the place originally. My only excuse is that I did not know your father's age and his attachment for the position."

"You must let me put my own estimate on your goodness. I can never tell you how much I feel it. It was more than kind. It was noble !" Her eyes filled. "You were right in thinking that it would hurt father to lose it. Nothing could have grieved him more. Pardon me if I don't know what to say to you. I am not accustomed to having to find words for such a favor. There are none. But I ask you to believe my gratitude."

She put out her hand impulsively and March took it. Something in her illumined face, its frank friendliness, its generous wishfulness to say her feeling, affected him indescribably. He saw in her eager eyes, or thought he saw, a large vision in which his doubts and perplexities and questionings of the past fortnight grew ineffably small. He felt that he had discredited her in not trusting the liberality of her outlook—it seemed so large at

the moment. It could not avoid making some account of the facts, but they were less important to it, he was sure, than they had been in his thought.

Lincoln's arguments recurred to him and he found his capacity and will to resist them failing from him. He felt the obligation to combat them, but he could not compel his tutored resolution to his aid. His scrupulously woven theories about her and their relation seemed crumbling about him in a fatal ruin, and for the instant he was recklessly glad. If she cared for him she would not be sorry that he had spoken, and if she did not, her generosity would see less than he did in his offence.

He continued to hold her hand as he said in a low voice, bending toward her,

"Don't use that miserly word ! There can be no such thing as gratitude between us." She looked up startled. "Do you think that the poor little things I have been able to do have been done to win your gratitude ? It has been because I loved you, though I haven't known it."

He looked into her face with a glowing tenderness before which her eyes drooped. She gently withdrew her hand.

"You are too good to say what you have the best right to say : I have not always thought so. No, that's true, and once I was brutal enough to say so." Constance blushed vividly. "I see I needn't remind you. It was shameful, and I hope you believe that I have the grace to feel I've no right to speak now, except such as I find in your charity. I had agreed with myself never to speak, and you see how I keep my resolve. I've no excuse—unless you call my love an excuse. That is for you to say."

"Stop! stop! It's treason to let you say what you have said. It's disloyal to let you go on. I am already bound—sacredly bound."

The pain that possessed him translated itself through his eyes, so that when he said, "I need not ask to whom?" she answered very gently,

"I don't know. It is to Mr. Keator. You remember him?"

"So clearly that I've no difficulty in measuring the slightness of my chance against him." He rose and stood by his chair while he said, "I can't presume to ask your pardon for having spoken, though I think in your goodness, you would grant it; but I can say 'good-bye.'"

He put out his hand. She rose and took it mechanically.

"Good-bye?" she said, slowly. "No! no! What do you mean?"

"What do *you* mean?" he asked, breathlessly, as he looked down into her eyes.

She resumed her throne abruptly, and he sank into his seat. Constance brushed her hand lightly and repeatedly over her gown, while she regarded it in absorption.

"You don't understand," she said, at length, in a low voice, without looking up.

"I should greatly like to," he returned, gravely.

She set her hand skimming in swifter motions over the smooth surface of her gown, while she turned her head half away, as women do when they wish to see a thing completely.

"It is—it is only temporary," she told him, looking up suddenly with a smile which dazzled him.

March stayed himself against his chair.

"Temporary? What?" he asked, huskily, as he leaned forward.

"I ought not to call it that. It is as binding as any engagement can be—only that he will not claim its fulfilment."

A light broke over March's face.

"You can't expect me to believe that!" he said.

Constance smiled.

"Ah! I see that I shall have to explain."

She went back and gave him some part of the history of her relation with Mr. Keator.

"Poor Keator!" exclaimed March, as she finished. "No wonder his resolution failed him for a moment. After such a sacrifice if he had not faltered for a little, one couldn't feel sympathy with him as a fellow-man. To think of his giving you up because of his duty to the Church! Compared with a surrender like that, what have I ever done to merit a thought of yours?"

Constance gave him an arch smile.

"I'm sure I can't fancy," she said, roguishly.

"It's a kind of impudence to name myself after such a man," he went on, quickly, not heeding her answer, "but I must know now. Dearest, I don't ask you to promise anything—it would be treason, as you say. But I have a right to know your feeling. Constance, you don't dislike me?"

She pretended to consider a moment.

"No," she said, judicially.

"Then——"

"Oh, Mr. March, Mr. Keator asked me if there was no one, nothing to interfere with my keeping my promise. And I told him no one—nothing."

Her face crimsoned, and she caught out her handkerchief to hide it.

"Do you think," she murmured, as she looked studiously down and made fold after fold in her dress, "that I ought to tell you—that ——"

"That you have the folly to care for such a poor fellow as I? No, dearest, don't expose yourself in that way. Let us take it for granted," he whispered, as he drew her toward him.

"I'm afraid we are not doing right," she said, doubtfully, as they began the descent of the steep stair some minutes later.

"If the pleasantness of a thing proves it wrong, we are committing nothing less than a crime," owned March, with the complaisance of his happiness.

"I am thinking what Mr. Keator would say. But what could he say? I promised nothing, you know."

"Yes, I know. But you think that he will not claim you before the year is out?"

"You know Mr. Keator; do you think it likely?"

March shrugged his shoulders.

"I know men, and it does not seem impossible. I think of my own feeling, darling," he whispered, as they paused on the stairs, "and it seems certain."

CHAPTER XX.

CONSTANCE'S rebellious confidence immediately after her father's death that somehow he must come back, that surely she should find him in his seat at table, or in his accustomed reading-chair, or at worst see him come driving down the long street at night, with his smile and kiss for her as he alighted, was not unlike the cheating assurance with which Mr. Keator indulged his aching heart as he went back to his house after his farewell to her. He repeated her words, and made the coach grow in the air before him, but there was only a single passenger, and she was leaning out and asking, "You do not wish me to stay? You are glad I am doing this?" His envious regret that he had not dared all, and accepted the sacrifice which her words had seemed to offer, passed instantly into a kind of enthusiasm for her generosity. And again her spirit was intensely present to him, and he could not disenchant himself from the stubborn faith that she must follow in person.

That night he lay awake imagining the things which she would say in the situations he provided for her. But they were like a manufactured mineral water. The chemical constituents were there—he had learned something of the formula in his long association with her—but the essential principle was lacking, and nothing could be more flat than the compound. It was a sort of

illusion which only put her further away by its spuriousness, and he remembered sadly that one of her great charms had always been the quality of surprise in her. It was very well to say that one knew her ideas, her opinions, even her character, but no one had the key to her fancy, and it was her discriminating use of that which gave one the agreeable sense of talking every day with a fresh person, who was yet preciously familiar. He summoned her before his disappointed vision in every form, and upon every side of her nature which she had made known to him. But the very likeness in unlikeness was more bitter than to own her lost altogether.

The mere sense of void, the longing to see her, the irresistible feeling that somehow the custom of yesterday must be the custom of to-day, and that if it was not other things must change importantly, were, however, more tolerable than the contest with himself, on which he entered when he rose next morning, and which he knew must at length be fought squarely out, and was not to be determined in a day or a month.

These are the battles that try men's strength. The fierce fights decided between sunrise and sunset ask the sudden bravery which most men can find for the emergency. Bunker Hill was fought with sounding music and fluttering colors, the urgency of commanders, each man's shoulder to his comrade's, the enemy in front, and the madness-working carnage everywhere. It was a matter of valor, and in the impetus of battle it is easier to be valorous than to be cowardly. But when the unkempt, starved, disease-smitten little army sat down at Valley Forge to face the hardships of a bitter winter, bravery was not the facile matter they had found it in battle. It was not stirring restlessly in their hearts, waiting to be

born in cheers upon their lips. It had to be forced to scorn cold and privation and nakedness.

Mr. Keator had not expected an easy victory over his love, but when he had asked Constance for the temptation with which he was now wrestling, his imagination, set it the task as he might, could not go forward among the slow days of the future and tell him with what pain they would be filled. His trouble rose with him in the morning, and made him so silent while he remained in the house, that Conrad, and Benicia—his faithful servant—asked themselves, and at length asked him, if he were quite well. His difficulty was not silenced by the busy occupations of the day. It was perhaps less intelligible than during the long nights, but it lay with a dull ache about his breast. If by chance he was distracted from it he returned to memory with an added pang. He was constantly assailed by the temptation to go and see her. She was really not very distant. He had but to take the coach which left the inn every other morning, and by the next morning he should be with her. He would sometimes plan how he might see her without her knowledge, but his relentless faith to the intention which he had expressed to her invariably restrained him.

Save to himself he had made no promises. That was the essence of his situation : he was perfectly free. He might go to Quinnimont ; he might remain there as long as it pleased him. She could not complain. It was she who had made the promises ; she was the only one who could break the literal word between them. But the spirit of their agreement, the tacit contract, was infinitely more sacred to him. The opportunity which she had generously yielded him to regain his self-respect—not

merely to refuse a good which was securely out of his reach, but to turn stoutly from a happiness, coveted above all things in the world, and to be had for stretching forth his hand—carried with it, he felt deeply, the obligation on his part to resist every approach to the temptation which he had set himself. It was not alone that finally he would not take what she nominally offered, but that during this time of probation he would punctiliously keep himself from so much as the appearance of a motion toward it.

He often sought consolation in the writing of sermons, whose admonitions, directed in form toward his flock, whipped his secret sins. He poured his soul into these compositions, and he had never preached so earnestly. It was said that Mr. Keator had received a special inspiration of late, and he received visits from members of his church who came to thank him for words that seemed spoken to their special need.

Occasionally their visits cheered him by the community of experience which they suggested, but he seldom found heart to palliate his own inclinations to sin, with knowledge that others were tempted like him. Even the elders spoke of the "wise and godly discourses" which induced them to hope that he was regaining his health, although one of them mentioned in private that "somehow Mr. Keator isn't looking right."

On a Sunday about a month after Constance had gone, he preached from the text, "Thinkest thou that I can not now pray to my Father and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" and drew from it the lesson of the genuine self-sacrifice—not the kind of denial which turns from desired things because of lack of energy, or to win the world's applause, or

declines an impossible joy ; but the rare, costly sort which nobly will not take that which fairly belongs to it, because it willingly bows to a higher right.* This sermon gave him great comfort both in the writing and delivery, for it set before him with inevitable clearness his whole duty and the highest thing toward which he was set to strive in the contest that engaged him. It stirred his hearers also, and that which seemed to them in it the wholesome ring of earnestness was no worse for being also the ring of experience.

The duties of his calling were certainly abundant enough to busy his mind. But care could not solace the incessant longing at his heart. The soldier's knapsack is not less a burden, we know, because his feet have occupation ; and the love, which he was making it his business to rid himself of, constantly weighed his spirit, whatever labor he might be about. His people, who were not extraordinarily observant, said among themselves that Mr. Keator's usual abstraction increased. But they could not complain of his want of diligence. In all the good works of the Church he was more than ever assiduous.

He visited his people privately more often than had been his wont, and strove to absorb himself in their spiritual needs. Physical necessities they had very few, for all were on a comfortable level of prosperity, and their constant, scrupulous, and varied industry gave them the best right to that ease about the affairs of this world which leaves leisure and peace of mind for thought of the next. Mr. Keator liked now, too, to go among his flock at their work and content himself with the sight of

* The originality of this interpretation with Mr. Keator, the writer wishes to disclaim.

their fruitful energy. He had a sound and thrifty sense about matters of money and every day needs, as they touched the welfare of his people, which might have surprised one who had approached him only on the side of his finely sensitive mental and spiritual organization.

It is true that he was by nature impractical ; but we know how men subvert their most stubborn characteristics, and teach themselves to do strange things for a great love. Such a love Mr. Keator bore his Church, and especially those members of its mystical body over whom he had been set. He had an affectionate feeling for each one of them, and a sympathetic understanding of their characters. Those whom he watched over, and guided, and loved, as a shepherd does his sheep, could not fail to give him back his affection ; and as he walked through the clock-works and the other factories—from which work came stamped with a better trademark, in the knowledge that Moravian faithfulness had guided its making, than all mercantile branding could give it—and went among the brethren at their work in the well-kept fields—the produce of which purchasers were glad of, because of their trust in farmers who scanted no measure and left the large potatoes at the bottom—all whom he met turned their faces at his greeting with a smile of keen liking. The women looked up from their work, within doors, with glances softer, because they were woman's glances, but with the same meaning in them—a meaning grateful to the minister in these days of self-distrust. The sense of this atmosphere of faithfulness to the common duties of life began, too, to have a new preciousness to him. He liked to feel it encompassing him. It breathed scorchingly upon the thought of the smallest disloyalty.

One afternoon as he was leaving the choir-house of the Single Sisters, he found himself at the rear doorway confronted by Sister Zelda's kindly old face. She was just going out to the garden, which was her especial charge.

"It is pleasant to see you again, Sister Zelda," said the minister, taking her hand. "They told me you had not been well."

"I have kept my room for a day or more. An old woman must expect it, you know." She smiled, but she looked sharply over her spectacles to ask him, "What do you hear from Constance—Sister Constance, if it is right that I should call her so?"

"I think you may call her Sister Constance, Sister Zelda," he returned, gravely. "I like best to think of her as still one of us, though she has gone away. I did not ask her to give up her position among us. She cares enough for us, I am sure, not to wish utterly to sever herself from that link to the memory of her father; and on our side we must remember, I think, that she is Dr. Van Cleef's daughter, and as such has a very especial claim upon us. He did much for the Church, and loved it; and none of us should harbor a thought of ill-will toward him because he had been away from us so long as to forget some of our rules, or against her because in her young pride she violated them."

"Nay, I should be much rejoiced to welcome her back. All of us would. She has no enemies among the sisters or brethren."

"No, no; I hope not. I hope not. She has most generous intentions toward us, I may tell you in confidence."

"That is like her," exclaimed Sister Zelda. "Will

you come out and watch me at my gardening?" she asked. "I must not lose time in idleness after missing so many good hours through my little sickness. I am getting old for the work up-stairs. They would rather keep spryer hands for the bread-winning work. But the garden is left to me. Even an old woman may mind that, and I must mind it well. Come out into the sunshine here, if you are in no haste, and we will talk together while I work."

She set herself briskly to the use of her trowel, while Mr. Keator stood before her on the other side of the bed, talking as he liked to do with this shrewd, light-hearted, gentle, little old woman about the affairs of the Church. He found sometimes more wisdom in her quick comments than in the deliberate pronouncements of the elders. But after they had discussed Church concerns for some time, they suddenly came back to questions more immediately within the range of personal feeling.

"You did not tell me what you hear from Sister Constance?"

"No ; I don't hear," answered the minister, briefly.

"She is with her aunt in Maryland still."

"Oh, yes ; I believe so. I have no reason to doubt it."

"And where is Mr. March?"

Mr. Keator looked as if he did not understand the connection of the thoughts, but he replied at once,

"In England, I suppose. He went back, you remember, on account of the death of his brother."

"Mr. Keator, did you think she had truly fixed her eyes upon him?"

The minister hesitated. "That was not the question,

you know," he said. "It was the effect of their association upon the others. That was what made the reproof needful after giving her due private warning. But I was very sorry Elder Weiss went so far."

This may have seemed to Sister Zelda like avoiding the question. At all events she brought the minister respectfully back to the subject of her inquiry. "Yes, yes, I did think Elder Weiss too hard, though of course it isn't for me to doubt the wisdom of the elders. If they weren't in love, it seems as if that might make them so."

This inclusion of March's feeling did not make the topic more agreeable to Mr. Keator.

"Oh, yes, yes; I thought of that, and it was bitter to me," he exclaimed, thinking aloud, unconsciously. "But I had no right to consider the consequences."

"No, you had your duty, though there might be godly ministers, methinks, who would not have such strict notions of duty in a matter like that."

"Perhaps; but I was bound to be strict, because I was tempted to be lenient."

"Yet she was only a girl. It was hard to wound her so."

"Very hard," assented Mr. Keator.

And after a time he went away, fancying that he had kept his secret from this shrewd dame.

But his impalpable sense touching March, thus given an outward embodiment, shamed him. He began to fear that he had been jealous of him. And what right had he to be jealous? Few things could have cut this sensitive man deeper than this thought; and he threw himself with even more than his former vigor into his labors for the Church.

In the pleasures which were dear to him he indulged himself less and less. He seldom now went into the woods to gather flowers, and his herbarium was thickly overlaid with dust. He summoned the brethren and sisters more frequently to *Sprechens*, and in this form of private spiritual confession encouraged and admonished them fervently. As he grew more rigorous with himself he unconsciously set up more inflexible standards for them, and young sisters would sometimes return to their choir-houses, after one of these intimate conversations with their pastor, wondering what had made Mr. Keator so strict of late.

The numerous festivals and anniversaries of the Church became more than commonly eager to have duly celebrated. Beginning with the *kinderstund*, or children's meeting, each choir had its special days set apart, and at different times in every week each had its services.

Conrad began to assist him in some part of his work, but Mr. Keator did as much as possible himself. The yearly *gemein fest* (the anniversary of the consecration of the church), the feast of the elders, the house feasts (in celebration of the consecration of the various choir-houses), the brethren's, widows', and sisters' feast, together with most of the regular festivals of the English Church, properly afforded occupation for more than one minister. Mr. Keator, however, only allowed Conrad's help upon the plea of a kind of preliminary training for him. He alleged that he needed no assistance, and in proof of this required more of his strength than it could give. His pale face became unnaturally colorless; his energy grew more and more a matter of will, and the Advent season found him much broken both in body and mind. The elders urged him to take a vacation,

and found him unexpectedly willing. He would go to New York, he said. He was expecting the arrival of a young lady by a vessel which would soon be due. An uncertain smile went about among the elders at this announcement, and Elder Reidel—who, in his capacity of admirer of Constance's voice, was accustomed still to maintain its superiority when music was discussed—said,

“What you say, Brother Keator, makes our errand easier. We do not think of marriages among the brethren as they do in the world outside, and as we are all brothers together in Christ”—Elder Reidel hesitated a moment and looked at his finger-nails, while Mr. Keator wondered, with a sick feeling about his heart, what was coming. “We are working for the same end, and—you tell him, Brother Berg!” he entreated helplessly, sitting down.

“Nay,” said the elder, “it is rather your office.”

“Well, you see, it's this way, Brother Keator,” continued Elder Reidel, desperately. His florid cheeks grew more red than usual, and the lines of his good-natured face, in which merriment sat at other times, were full of perplexity. “We would like to see you well married, that is all.” He wiped his forehead. “Of course, with proper submission of the question to the Lord by lot and the approval of the Council, for it is wisely said that the minister's marriage is of public importance, and not—‘not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly,’” he concluded, with a sense of relief in finding the sentence ready made to his hands.

“We do not presume to advise,” said Elder Weiss; “we merely suggest.”

Elder Englehart, who had sat quietly listening, interposed with,

“You must not misunderstand us, brother ; we have no call to make or meddle in the matter. We know that. But as brethren together we have taken thought for you. You have not seemed well of late—and perhaps—we do not mean to pry, brother—not quite happy. You have no head in your household, and you remember the scripture words, ‘It is not good for man to live alone.’ ”

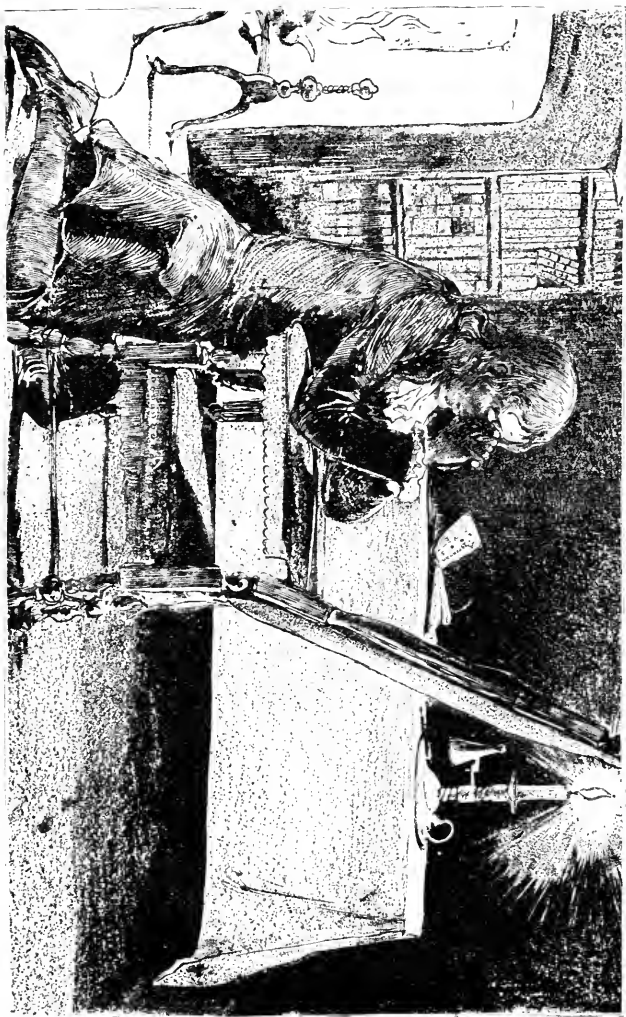
Brother Berg, who felt easier, although Mr. Keator said nothing, but simply looked rather quizzically from one to the other as they spoke, said that they ought to add that his marriage would be for the Church’s advantage also.

“That looks as if we had been saying one word for you and two for ourselves,” he owned, with his broad, complaisant smile. “But we do not mean that. It would be for our good that you should take a discreet woman to yourself. That is true ; but much more for your own. I would not go to speak of my own experience——”

Brother Berg indulged a mysterious smile and watched himself twirl his thumbs.

The other elders smiled with him, for Mistress Berg was notoriously the ruler of her mild husband. Mr. Keator rubbed his shaven chin, and tapped with his crutch the hearth before which he sat in a deep, leathern chair. The embarrassment of the group visibly renewed itself while they waited for him to speak.

“I thank you for your interest, brothers,” he said, at length, gently. “What you have said shall receive my attention. It is fair to tell you that it has already engaged a share of it. I have not been unmindful of the propriety of marrying. You are right, I think, in believing that a minister’s power for good is multiplied when he



Kneeling before his chair, the harassed minister prayed fervently for strength."

takes a proper wife, and to that end, as you have delicately refrained from saying, the Church advises early marriages among her clergy. You will believe that I have always felt this, but I—circumstances in which——. My dear brethren, may I not ask for some time to consider your suggestion? It comes somewhat unexpectedly. Upon my return——”

“Then the young woman whom you are to meet——?” hesitated Elder Berg.

“Is my sister. I ought to have told you that. She has been for some years at school in England. I hope to have her with me permanently now.”

The elders made their exclamations and congratulations, and took their departure. But Mr. Keator remained for a long time in his chair before the fire, reflecting, with some self-accusation, upon the incident. He wondered whether the elders represented the general desire of his congregation. If they did, he felt that it brought what suddenly seemed to him his paltering with his feelings to an issue. He must either give up the smallest thought of Constance or his pastorate. If the congregation wished a married minister—and surely it was a fair desire—who was he that he should oppose them? The test of himself which he was making, for a moment seemed fantastic, but immediately all his finer senses rose to protest its reasonableness. Yet somehow, it must be brought to an end. In other words, he must put Constance wholly out of his thought, and as he stated this to himself he groaned in conscious weakness at the memory of her dearness, and the impossibility of an act that alienated her. The harassed minister rose impetuously, and kneeling before his chair prayed fervently for strength.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE coming of Rose Keator brought about many changes. She did not look like a revolutionist with her flaxen hair, and blue eyes set in her bright face, but from the moment she entered her brother's plain house she began, as people from afar will, to try things by her standards, and when they failed by these maidenly measures she set herself to bring about the proper correspondence. She observed to herself at once, for instance, that her brother's home was the home of a bachelor.

"Poor brother!" she exclaimed. "Is this the way you have been living?"

"I don't know what you mean, dear, but I think Benicia has changed nothing on account of your arrival."

"Unpapered walls, uncarpeted floors, books and newspapers everywhere!" she went on, recounting the enormities to herself. "Does Benicia ever dust?"

"Not here. I should never find any thing. I'm afraid of her."

"I shall make you afraid of me," she cried, laughing, as she led the way to the adjoining room.

"You are at liberty to do anything you like; only remember the amount of my stipend."

"One can be neat on very little," replied Rose, slyly.

Conrad accompanied them while she inspected the house in her travelling dress.

"There is space enough," she said. "It will make a

nice little house for our small family ; but you have not been treating it well."

Conrad was amused.

"We are not housekeepers," he said, with a smile which prepared Rose to like him.

"I see I must make friends with the one who holds that office," answered the girl.

"She has been very faithful. You must approach her gently," said Mr. Keator.

"She shan't know that she is being supplanted, and I shall hope to make her believe that she wishes all that I shall do. I've been living very simply, but I see I shall have to bring out all my store of diplomacy, John," she said, laying her hand absently on his shoulder.

It was long since he had seen his sister, and he remembered her only as a child. He was charmed with her. Her caressing touch was a kind of balm. The family amenities, the endearments among kindred had been a forgotten thing to him for many years. Now that he knew them again they were indescribably sweet. He felt that his sister's pure presence was a kind of guard against wrong of any kind. To have some one always near who had faith in one by the tie of blood, and a right to complain if her faith was abused, was to be hedged by a secure barrier against every species of wrong-doing.

Lacking the protection of both father and mother, Rose had been thrown, from her infancy, entirely upon her brother's care, and the pains which her nurture and education had cost him were not things to diminish his affection for her, while she looked up to him gratefully as her childish hero. When her sensible training at the excellent provincial school in which he had placed her

was complete, she had found, for a few years, a home in a family whose members had been friends of her mother. She had taught the children, and occupied herself with the duties of a governess under the most urbane discipline and mild requirements. Her experience had naturally imparted a certain independence to her character, but it had not robbed it of its essential gentleness and grace. She was known for her energy, which was indomitable, though not of the restless sort which deprives the subject of its kindly efforts of comfort, in order to make them comfortable.

She went about the reform of her brother's house with modest but relentless vigor. Her revolutions were wrought with the quickness and secrecy of conspiracy, and were usually accomplished, after the ingenious womanly manner, when no men were about to interfere. She caused Mr. Keator to spend a day with her in Philadelphia, where she surprised the deliberate shopkeepers by her uncommon familiarity with her own wishes, and the alertness of her decisions touching papers and carpets. They must have something simple, she said, but something pretty and not expensive. This difficult desideratum she secured, despite the protestations of the shopkeepers that they had not what she wanted. She waited patiently until they had proved themselves wrong, and then gently declined their offers of richer articles—offers made in a manner which ought to have convinced any one of his mistake in imagining that he knew what he desired.

When she returned to Judea she called in the services of a brother, who had served an apprenticeship to a paper-hanger before joining the community and, with Benicia and one of the young boys as carpet layers, she

worked a transformation in the course of a week which won Mr. Keator's praise. He had not been accustomed to reckon with the adornments of life, but he recognized their grace and efficacy now that they were offered him, and he began to have a sense of pride in such a sister. The neatness and propriety of his table, Rose's becoming presidency at the head of it, the ingenious devices of her planning for making his life smooth in all ways, gave him genuine satisfaction. He would not have supposed himself capable of finding pleasure in such things, but the charm of them grew upon him. He began to enjoy her energy, which spent itself wisely but unsparingly upon the mysterious needs of housekeeping. Benicia had not given him the idea that there was so much to do, and he began to tell his sister that he fancied she invented work to keep her hands busy.

"We never did so much before," he declared.

"You were camping out, you know, brother."

"I hope we have begun to live in a fit dwelling," he said, taking her hand with his kindly smile.

"Do you like it?"

"I like everything, dear—everything that you've done." He stooped and kissed her. "You have been a magician to the house; but the best thing in it will always be its mistress."

Her light laugh in the old parsonage seemed to imbue him with its cheerfulness; her womanly step and carriage, the rustle of her brief skirts, the deft, vision-endowed fingers that went before him everywhere for his comfort, her trim little figure at the fireside, even her anxious squaring of the dinner-table grew dear to him.

In his pleasure in her presence the tormenting thoughts which had haunted his loneliness retreated, and only

attacked him at intervals. He sunned himself in the light of Rose's affectionate care for him. In this complaisant humor he was ready to believe, as was indeed partly true, that his people, who began to love his sister, would see how nearly she filled the place which they desired to see filled, and be content until he could solve his difficulty. If they only wished to see him happy it seemed to him that his present condition must be entirely satisfying to them. He was also much stronger recently.

Rose was an unimpeachable Moravian, and she went about the work of the choirs and the Church with the energy of her housekeeping. "The Messiah" was in course of rehearsal for Christmas, and engaged much of her attention. She was offered a solo part, but declined it for the office of leader of the girls' chorus. She said that she thought she could be more useful there, which was another way of saying that the place enabled her to multiply the force of her musical training, which had been uncommonly full, instead of barrenly exhibiting it. Her devotion to the girls' chorus when she had taken it up was strenuous. The constant use of music among the Moravians made them apt pupils, and it was one of Rose's pleasures to gather them about the old organ in the Sisters' Choir-house, and play over Handel's inspiring music. It spoke dearly to her of the things which she knew, and most sweetly of the myriad mysterious things which she only guessed and dreamed; and to these thoughts the clear voices of the girls made harmonious accompaniment.

She found time, too, to interest herself in mission work, and assisted in the making up of a box sent to Greenland full of clothing, with a scanty provision of cates and comfits tucked away in the corners. In the

Sisters' Choir there was a missionary cupboard, from which colored representations of scenes in the Saviour's life and certain tracts were added to the box, for the Greenlanders' education. But the Christmas festival pressed too closely to allow any work less urgent to occupy her long. Rose had many gifts to make for her new friends, and as presents of the season were, by custom and partly of necessity, usually the work of the giver's hands, this involved much labor. She knitted work-bags, gauntlets and muffedettes; for the old women she made pretty caps of muslin with a close-clipped bank of black ribbon atop; for the children she prepared sweetmeats and confections of every sort.

She was obliged to duplicate many of her gifts, and the gathering of pasteboard alumette stands, covered with luminous paper, which sat on her table Christmas eve, was a small host. All the day preceding Christmas she spent gilding walnuts, stringing popped corn, and making lace stockings, to be filled with candy for the tree which was displayed to the children that evening before the regular Christmas eve services. Mr. Keator, who had the faculty of talking to children, told them the story of the Christ-child, and for the time forgot all pains in watching their simple glee as their gifts were handed to them, and they gazed in childish rapture on the tree, brilliantly alight with honey-scented candles. His sister was busiest among the group that unloaded the tree for the children, and her nimble fingers outstripped the uneager motions of the sisters.

It was good to see the smile with which she accompanied each gift, and as she went beamingly about the burdened pine she seemed to Mr. Keator a spirit of happiness sent for his solace and cheer. He did not wish to absorb

all her healing force ; he felt selfish as it was. Such grace and benediction ought to be for all the world. But as he stood observing her he was deeply grateful for his share in it, and humbly wondered what he had done to merit it. His heart was full of the Christmas peace which harbors no thought less than the largest, and, when he rose to preach in the church that night, after the love-feast, the people saw a calm light in his face not born of this world's meditations.

He had intended to speak to them directly of the event which was to be celebrated on the morrow, but the feeling at his heart was too strong, and he imparted it to them in earnest phrases which reached his hearers, because each word was charged with its yearning to testify of the light which he had found. "And they murmured against him," was his text. He pictured the distrust and complaining impatience of Christ's teaching during his earthly ministry. He said that a like weakness possessed the restless souls of the present who could not brook the slow justifying of God's purposes, who chafed under difficulty and disaster, and were not able to turn their eyes forward contentedly to the future, in which all things should be made right.

"Patience, I know, brethren, is a hard word. It is one of the greatest gifts of grace. To face a barren life with its every-day desolateness, to wait calmly for the sure light and help, with your present problem or sorrow confronting you from hour to hour, is not easy. But trust in God, unquenchable faith in the design which you cannot see, will make it easier. We shall all waver in seeking them : no one knows that more sadly than your minister ; but at length, even in this life, your happiness will come out of your grief or difficulty ; the word will be

spoken, the key handed you, and in the illumination of your content the path behind you will be made plain. In that light, how ungrateful our murmurings, how wicked our rebellion ! Let us strive for that perfect submissiveness which shall finally be rewarded by the peace that passeth all understanding."

His audience could not make the personal application ; they only saw that his eloquence had from some source gained a higher note. Rose marvelled at her brother's eloquence. She had often heard him preach since her arrival, but to-night he seemed to weave a spell about her ; she listened motionless, and when he had done, released herself from his influence with a sigh of pleasure.

As Mr. Keator came down the pulpit stairs she endeavored to catch his eye, and when she had succeeded gave him a look of restrained joy and pride. He came to her at once and they went out together. In the courtyard without, among the choir-houses, they stood in the snow watching the brethren and sisters emerge from the church, each with a lighted waxen taper in his hand, singing, "Hark ! the Herald Angels Sing," to Mendelssohn's music.

The candles illumined the snow in patches and threw their moving shadows on its glittering surface. The groups, dividing and making avenues of light among the gray old buildings, sang as they went to their several choir-houses, and the brother and sister heard the sound fading and then die quite away, save in the Sisters' House, from within which the clear, rejoicing sopranos were borne, softened to their ears as they stood listening in the darkness :

"Hark ! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new born king !"

Rose took her brother's arm and they walked slowly home. Occasional candles in the hands of the married brethren went flickering down the freshly whitened street. In the keen air the footfalls of the two cut the new fallen snow with a sharp, crunching sound which went echoing down the silent road. Mr. Keator paused to button his well-worn great-coat about him. The numerous charities and good works of the Church, to which he loved to give from his slender stipend, kept him poor, and his own clothing was the last thing which he considered.

Rose had endeavored to induce him to buy a new great-coat when they were in Philadelphia, but he had gently refused.

"This does very well," he had said; but he had told himself that he could not afford both the fresh household decorations and the coat, and it was not in his heart to deny her the innocent purchases she had planned.

As he drew the garment more tightly about his slim figure and grasped his crutch he drew her arm closely within his.

"John, do you often preach like that?" she asked.

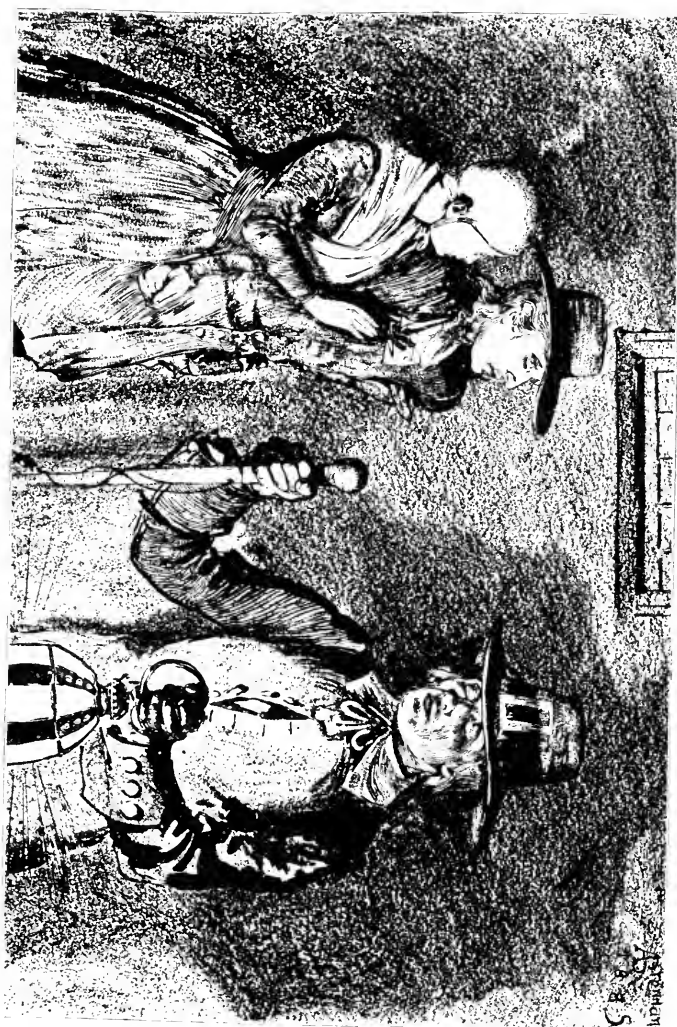
"I don't know. Did it help you?"

"Yes, and it must have helped others. That is the kind of sermon, I fancy, which reaches every one. Did you see old Sister Zelda lean over and shake hands with me at the end? She wanted me to thank you for it. It seemed to speak to every-day needs. Where did you learn so much about them, brother? Not in your musty library?"

"No, in my musty heart. It has not grown so old yet that it has not some human weaknesses of its own."

"Was it a sermon of experience?"

Illustration
by
J. B. S.



“The old watchman paced slowly by them, crying, as he bade them a merry Christmas: ‘Hear, brethren, hear! The hour of mine is come! Keep pure each heart, and chasten every home!’”



"Did you detect the personal cast?"

She glanced at him curiously in the darkness.

"Poor John! You have not passed through all the struggles that you pictured?"

"I am afraid it was more or less autobiography. And do you know, Rose, what the light was that came to teach me the sin of murmuring and brought me content?"

"How can I guess?"

"It was the little maid beside me, dear. You can't imagine how rebellious I was before you came."

"You overrate her; but I don't understand, brother."

Mr. Keator was silent a moment. The old watchman paced slowly by them with his staff and lantern, crying, as he bade them a merry Christmas:

"Hear, brethren, hear!

The hour of nine is come!

Keep pure each heart,

And chasten every home!"

Rose caught a glimpse of her brother's face as the lantern's rays smote it. Memory had seized upon him, and the anguished look upon his narrow-drawn visage almost frightened her.

"Why, John," she exclaimed, "what are you thinking of? What troubles you?"

"Nothing in the present, dear; something that is quite past, I hope."

"Don't tell me unless you wish."

They were passing a window out of which the light of a thousand fireflies seemed to burn and twinkle. A gathering of children romped about a shining tree, laden with bon-bons and bright-colored balls, stars and flags, golden walnuts, tissue baskets and some of Rose's own lace stockings filled with candy. At one side was a

model of Herrnhut, the mother Moravian settlement, in moss and pasteboard; an avenue of lime-trees joined it with Bertholdsdorf, on the left, and lying under the same mossy mountain. Near the window was a miniature Bethlehem with a copious heaven of stars, amid which the angels swam in a glow of light. Below were the shepherds, the little white houses, and in the centre the inn and the open manger, holding the Christ-child. Over all, in an illumined semi-circle, one read the legend: "Unto you a child is born; unto you a son is given." It was very simple art, but the mother sat in the midst of these joyous tableaux touching the harpsichord softly and glancing over her shoulder at her children's happiness, and the pretty scene was such a picture of love and peace as any beholder must have been gladder for. Mr. Keator turned away with an unspoken joy in his heart, and Rose fancied she saw a new intelligence gleaming from his eyes as if he had just given a messenger grateful audience.

"No, Rose," he said, as they walked on; "I want to tell you. With the air full of the Christmas message, how should I be at rest concealing it? That is what gives the confessional its hold," he mused. "Yes, yes, the feeling that somehow avowal shifts a share of the wrong by making it so far public, the sense that in a way forgiveness is begun, the sight of a visible pardoner standing as vicar to the unseeable All-pardoner—yes, yes, all that has comfort for infirm human nature. I can't tell you how I feel that to-night. Such a constant bustle goes on in my head. It's impossible to be sure that even now I have found the end. It seems so—these Christmas sights and sounds—but I don't know, I want to get it before myself."

They were in front of their door, and he pushed her gently in while he continued,

"And yet I hope that it is not only that poor, selfish purpose. I feel that I owe it to you. For it is you, Rose, who brought the light. I have told you that."

Rose silently let him take her shawl and outer cap, and went with him into the library. She seated herself upon the hassock at his feet, while he took his usual chair. He did not light a candle, but stirred the fading embers, and threw fresh wood on the andirons. For some moments he leaned back in his chair, giving rein to his melancholy memory; then he took one of her hands in his and began his story in a low voice.

Rose looked for a time into the fire when he had done, and when she spoke at length kept her eyes fixed upon the vagrant flames. She leaned an arm upon his knee.

"Poor John!" she exclaimed, softly. Then of a sudden, "You never could abuse such confidence. What made you fear that you could?"

"Ah, did I fancy that I could propose to abandon my ministry for love of her? After that what may not happen? I seem to be just forming acquaintance with myself, to be treading fresh ground. I don't know when I may sink through."

"You mean that you didn't; that is over now, you know."

"Yes, yes, I trust so," he returned, not quite easily, as he leaned a little forward and rubbed his forefinger and thumb together thoughtfully.

Both were silent for a long time, and his arm stole about her where she sat. Rose broke the stillness at last with,

"John, do you remember how I used to lie awake Christmas eve waiting for Santa Claus, and how you would come in late, after your studies, to kiss me and see that I was sleeping well? You know I used to pretend to be asleep, and the next morning when I had emptied the stocking you had filled I would confess. Dear old John, how I used to deceive you!"

"Ah, those were sweet times!"

"But not better than to-day—do you think so, John?"

"No, no! God is good. Great joy comes with our added pains."

"You would not have had it all otherwise, John. Look back. You would not have denied yourself the privilege of loving her if you could."

"Understanding what was to follow?"

"Yes, even understanding what was to follow."

He drew his bushy eyebrows together.

"No, surely no. Not to have known her—that would have been the greatest calamity."

"It is very hard that you can not marry her," she exclaimed, abruptly taking a look at the matter from the other side.

"Pray, don't consider it in that way. I am sufficiently inclined to rebel as it is."

"Dear brother, don't mistake me. It *is* hard, but you are taking the only right way. I praise your courage in giving yourself the temptation. I feel its difficulty. But you know—I ought not even to speak of it as a possibility—you know how I should despise you if you should yield."

Her hard words cheered him.

"Not a thousandth so much as I should despise myself. And yet I am living upon the edge of it every

day. Don't talk of it as impossible. It is its very possibility that gives it value as a trial."

"It is a severe trial."

He stroked her golden hair upon which the fire-light played.

"Don't think of it, sister. It is enough for one to bear it. You speak of my courage. It was the poor courage of the moment. If I had fancied the load which it would bring with it, which I carry about with me every day—even now, since you have come, since I have won comparative peace, my most shameless self-flattery will not let me believe I should have found the strength."

Rose fell into a deep study, gazing at the fire. She took her arm from his knee, and setting her elbows upon her lap supported her cheeks between her hands.

"She was in love with some one else," said she, suddenly.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because if she had not been she would have done more than esteem you. She would have loved you as you loved her," exclaimed the girl, with conviction.

She clasped her hands about her knee, and sat staring into the fire, allowing the weight of this assurance to reach her brother. She had at least secured his silence for a few moments.

"I can't think so well of myself as that," he said.

"You need not, brother; only think of *him*. Who was he? Didn't you speak of a young Englishman—?"

"Mr. March? There was certainly—" began Mr. Keator.

"Mr. March, that is it," cried Rose. "Where was he? Where did he stay while he was here?"

"At Dr. Van Cleef's," answered the minister.

"Of course. And there he met Miss Van Cleef, and saw her every day, and——"

"Don't, don't, Rose! Don't make me think that. I should be grieved to think that. Remember, I haven't thoroughly conquered even yet."

"Oh, pardon me, brother. I didn't mean to hurt you. And yet it was the natural conclusion. He *was* in love with her, wasn't he?"

"No—no, no! I hope I can say truthfully now that it was not so. At one time it was my selfish fear—as if, if I loved her, I should not wish that she should be happy in her own way—but no," he said, slowly, "no, I think not."

"Don't you mean that you wish to think not? What reason have you for thinking that it is not so?"

Rose turned her face up toward his, earnestly.

"You don't ask easy questions, Rose?"

"No," she assented, gently.

"And the answer to this one would take a long time. Aren't you tired and sleepy after your work about the tree?"

"John!" she exclaimed, reproachfully. "Do you think I shall ever be tired when I can do anything for you?"

It was characteristic of him that in telling her the long history of his passion for Constance he should have omitted all mention of the barrier to his union with her. He had said that, complying with her father's wish, she had offered to yield to his desire and marry him. She was, however, not a member of the Church, and in other ways, not stated, would not prove acceptable to the Conference. This had been the temptation before which he had fallen. To have spoken of March, of his

warning to Constance, and the final reproof in the church would have involved a certain reflection upon Constance, and especially would have put his own conduct in a light which he feared would win her praise and pity—two things from which he modestly shrank. In telling the story now he put the worst face he could conjure upon his acts, but as he would not depart from the truth, Rose's murmurs of admiration interrupted him.

"It was a bitter temptation," he concluded. "And when she was good enough to say that there might be worse lots than to be my wife——"

"Worse lots!" broke in Rose, with emphasis. "I should hope so."

"Nay, was it in any way a high lot? Remember her breeding, her education. Looking at it superficially, dear, what was there to tempt her, and less—ah, much less, if she looked beneath? This is not a large place, and she was born for the city. I used always to see that in the midst of the blind hope that hoped against all these facts. A clergyman upon a small salary, in a small village—the home of a people with whose faith and life she had no sympathy! What was there in that prospect to lead her to forsake the assured prosperity and brilliancy of the life I knew she had planned for herself?"

"You forget that you were that clergyman," said Rose, with the softest suggestion of a smile.

"Ah, no! That is what I remember—a cripple, a man of meagre parts——"

She clapped her hand over his mouth caressingly.

"Hush, hush! you shall not slander yourself in that way. She ought to feel glad and honored to marry such a man; and some day, if she is half so sensible as you think her, and is not in love with Mr. March, she would

be if—ah, John, isn't it dreadful ! You can't do it, and I wouldn't have you. But it's hard. What could be worse ! Let me help you bear it. I can't tell you how I feel for you. But, oh, John, never, *never* yield ! ”

“ I ought to marry at once. The elders wish it. My people would be glad. It is the one thing that would put the wicked lure forever behind me.”

“ No, John ; don't you see that that would be shirking, not to speak of the crime you would commit against the poor woman whom you married, not only without loving her, but loving another ! You have accepted the temptation. You must bear all that it brings.”

“ I know it, Rose, I know it. I trust I do not seek to shun any part of my duty. It is only when the horror of the possibility—sometimes it has seemed hideously possible—comes over me, that I think of such expedients.”

“ Do not dream of them ! It would be wrong to yourself, a wrong, above all, to her generosity. The worst of it is over now, and you will face it to the end.”

“ Nay, you had not thought that I would shuffle with it ? ” he asked, seriously, as his brow knitted in a manner rare with him.

“ Surely you know my trust in you. How can you think it ? It is not you I fear. It is she.”

“ In what way, dear ? ” he asked, with an instant return of his gentle manner. “ I do not wish to vaunt my new-found strength, but I think you need not be troubled for either of us. As long as she has faith in me, and with you near me, dear, nothing can shake me. I feel that now,” he said, rising while she gave him his crutch.

The fire was burned low ; it was almost dark in the room. They heard the watchman crying his midnight couplet to the vacant street.

“ I shall have torture to suffer yet,” he went on. “ But I shall be given endurance. To-night has yielded me surety of that. A new peace comes over me. This is the first Christmas we have spent together in a long time, sister. Let us get all possible happiness out of it.” He limped to the door. “ My megrims shan’t harass this little maid’s brains so much again. Good-night,” he whispered, as he kissed her.

The sound of trumpets from the church-tower, greeting the Christmas morning, leaped upon the still air.

“ Ah, how dare any one be foreboding with that sound in his ears ! ” exclaimed Rose.

“ Yes, dear, it bears a promise—the Christmas promise. But it is for us to fulfil it in our hearts. May God give us strength ! ”

CHAPTER XXII.

CONSTANCE told her aunt the whole story. If she could have announced her engagement to Mr. March, she would have stated that fact alone and left Mrs. Echols's imagination to fill up the blanks. But as the matter stood it was very far from easy to say in a few words what she meant, or how the position in which she found herself had become possible. Certainly the vocabulary of society did not furnish her with a phrase which sufficiently declared her present relation to March. She put it before her aunt as well as she could ; and this was an effective way of placing her position lucidly before herself. She began to feel how the importance to her of Mr. Keator's action had deepened within the few hours which had elapsed since March's proposal.

The cost of the failure of the minister—supposing it possible—had been suddenly magnified. It was not only its meaning for her. Another was involved now. She found herself exaggerating, in the light of this perception, her sense of the weakness of human nature in opposition to her knowledge of Mr. Keator. But her abiding trust in him consoled the rare moments in which she found it possible to imagine ill of him.

It was after all her own duty toward him which really troubled her. The impossible possibility of a lapse on his part was a thing about which she might safely let her fancy play. But she remembered that her compact with

Mr. Keator imposed its obligations upon her as well as upon him, and this brought its immediate difficulties. It was the evening of the day on which March had spoken, and she had already told her story. Mrs. Echols, in a dressing-sack, was seated before her mirror slowly drawing a comb through her thin hair.

"I was thinking of you," she said, as Constance entered.

"I am glad of that," returned Constance, as she came toward her. "I need some one to do a great deal of thinking for me." She stood behind her aunt's chair and looked musingly into the mirror over her head. "Let me do that," she said, at length.

This was a service that she had often rendered Mrs. Echols, and she worked silently for some time. The task had a kind of fascination to her. She remembered as a child climbing up and begging to be allowed to comb her mother's hair. She began with long, even sweeps, but her touch was less soft and certain than usual.

"Is it that I am tired after the theatricals, Constance, or are you? It's not as soothing to-night."

"No, aunt?" asked her niece, quietly, and for a time was more careful.

But she absently fell again into an irregular, unskilled motion.

"What is it, dear?"

With the womanly respect for half expressions, Constance did not affect to misunderstand.

"I've been thinking whether I am right in letting it go on."

Mrs. Echols reflected a moment.

"Is it Mr. Keator?" she asked. The girl continued combing as she paused. "Is it because——?"

She did not complete her thought.

"Yes, aunt. I would not fail in the slightest appearance toward him," exclaimed Constance, relying upon her hearer's intelligence. "You see, the very fact that the engagement was not entered into to be fulfilled, and—and all the circumstances make me feel that it ought to be kept especially sacred."

"I didn't like to say it when you told me, but doesn't it seem to you to have been a little—ill-advised, shall we say?"

Constance drew the comb quickly.

"As the world looks at such things, perhaps. But I could not refuse him. My father's wish seemed to command me, since it could not be carried out, to give him at least this poor substitute. I can't explain it, but I did it, and I hope I'm not base enough to be sorry for it."

"I was not thinking of your father's desire," said Mrs. Echols, slowly, "and you must remember, I don't know Mr. Keator. Things are often right with all the surroundings which appear doubtful at a little distance. I only meant that I should not have counselled you to do it."

Constance was silent for a moment. She could not argue for her act. Sacrifice is, of course, unreasonable and inexpedient, being more likely to help some one else than one's self. That it is unjustifiable on practical grounds, is a grievous defect if one must defend it by logic. Constance perceived this, but she was not sorry for it. Perhaps she felt that an act was not necessarily the worse for shocking the laws of expediency.

But her reflections drew her back again to the thought of her duty in the position which this act had brought about.

"Don't you think I had better go away?" she asked, faintly, at length.

"My dear girl!" exclaimed her aunt, turning about. "How could we spare you? Send him!"

"Remember his work. There is nothing to keep me—that is, nothing in that sense. Of course, it would grieve me to leave you, but—one's betrothal must always change the conditions of one's life, I suppose. And I couldn't help him any longer at Gerrit, you know."

Mrs. Echols leaned her elbow upon the chair-back and studied the girl's face. There was a wistful look upon it, but the energy of her determination was also readable.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, taking her hand and stroking it. "You must do what you think best. Only remember, you will leave us all mourning."

"It is you I take into account first. I don't see how I can leave you."

"You won't find it easy to persuade him."

"I shan't consult him too much," declared she, with a touch of her old pride. "It's not as if we were engaged."

But the love in her heart was deeper than the independence of this expression may indicate, and she woke next morning wondering what it was that made her so happy. Her pulses bounded as she remembered why, and lying there all alone she faintly blushed. She rose and went absently about the house. No one else was awake, and she had that intense feeling of loneliness which the night itself does not bring; but for once it was a merry loneliness. She sang softly to herself as she opened the heavy shutters and watched the light stream eagerly into the rooms from which it had been barred.

"It is going to be fair," she said to herself, looking out at the sun brightening the dewy tree-tops and driving the mountain mist before him.

For the first time in her experience she allowed herself a superstition—an extremely harmless one.

"It is a good omen," she whispered to herself.

She marvelled, as she walked the portico, at the new, rare pleasure she found in everything that met her eye. The liveliness of her observation, the agile movement of her fancy, were parts of an altogether foreign delight. When had she seen so much before? Then she blushed as she had blushed when she awoke. When had she felt so much before? She wondered how it could be that this feeling which was so rich, so precious, so magical now that it came, could have lain so long unwelcomed in her bosom. For it was not the birth of a moment. She knew that. It had grown up through a long time and made its home in her breast silently, without giving a hint. It was an absurd vexation that she should not have known; it seemed to impugn her understanding of herself, she reflected, with a humorous smile.

She went down into the garden and wandered among the scrupulously-kept beds. The trees had almost lost their foliage; only the hardiest flowers remained. She glanced affectionately at the peach tree which March had climbed for her. It had scarcely a leaf, but the sunlight was falling warmly on it and making diamonds out of the heavy dew, which, in this climate, the October night had not turned to frost. Her eyes roved about the garden, whose trim parterres were so many reminders of the dear garden in Judea. And this drew her thought to her father. She wondered whether he would approve.

She recalled his words with a gently reproachful pain :

“ Remember, that I thought of it; that is what I should like to leave with you : that I thought of it.”

These words had been a command to her. She could not chide herself for remissness in attempting to accomplish his desire. But it had not been possible, and now was not this a becoming re-reading of his wish? He had liked Mr. March. Even without knowledge of the great secret kindness he had done him, would he not sanction this disposition of her life? She was glad to be able to think so. Without this faith in his approval she felt that she could not have gone on. In the garden she plucked a bunch of the late flowers with the autumn pallor upon them and took them into the house. Within, among a collection of articles brought from use at the theatrical performance, her eye fell upon Mrs. Bartlett's vase. She did not analyze the emotion which led her to take it from its covering and put it upon the table, nor inquire reasons for her gratitude to the mistake which had brought it here ; and taking the flowers which she had gathered, she decorated the vase for the table with a thoughtful smile.

She did her usual little tasks about the house after breakfast in a soft agitation of happiness. She had never felt any sensation at all similar. Was it possible, she asked herself, that she had surrendered so completely as that? It both abashed and pleased her. As a young girl one of her private words to herself had been that she should never go so far in a matter like this as certain of her acquaintance. She had always cherished her reserves, and it alarmed her at the moment to think that any one should be privileged to overcome them. It was at least

possible, she reflected, to conceal the considerableness of the conquest. Out of her hundred guns she would give up sixty, say. That was sufficiently generous.

In feminine assemblages she had often heard it astutely argued that women gave too much, and had listened to condemnations of that form of unwisdom consisting in allowing a man to know how dear a woman holds him. It was, however, no part of this feminine logic, which seemed to her to imply merely the retention of a path for retreat that withheld her. She excused the sweet disturbance that went on in her breast during the morning by the reflection that this was the first occasion on which she had been offered the sensation of awaiting a lover's call. It is fair to say that she rejoiced with a kind of recklessness in throwing open her heart to the delicious tumult that assailed it. In its secure privacy she devoted herself to him with the unreserve of a girl's first passion. She simply shrank from admitting the world to her secret, and especially from admitting him.

However, she met March when he came cantering up to the door in the early afternoon, as she would have wished to meet him—which is saying much. When, after a time, they issued from the grounds together on horse-back, they went galloping away into a realization of the mythical Indian summer. It was, in fact, a nearly perfect day—a condescension of the Autumn, which obviously had the right to be cold. The sun shone upon the vivid green of the winter wheat. It fell also upon unnumbered acres of corn stacked like battalions of toy soldiers in rows, which recent wind-storms had toppled to the South, giving them the appearance of being on their march to that salubrious region.

March's attention to Constance's wants was almost

imaginative. He had, of course, always been careful of them, but he enjoyed using his new rights and was perpetually sending his wits on excursions to find something to do for her. It was true that many of the things which he found to do were perfectly useless, but Constance did not like them the less for that. On the whole, March made quite as graceful a lover as it is given to the usual man to be, and their common sense of humor rescued the situation from that abyss of absurdity upon the verge of which, in its least fortunate moments, it is apt to hover.

"What an associative thing a perfume is!" exclaimed Constance, as they passed a field from which a peculiarly sweet odor arose. "The odor of wild grape connects me always with some of the pleasantest moments of my life."

"I don't remember."

"No, that was before I met you. You mustn't think I didn't sometimes have happy moments before that."

March laughed.

"You can't have had too many," he said, "unless they are connected with another man."

She shook her head smilingly.

"There never was another."

"You forget Mr. Keator," returned March, half seriously.

"Oh," said Constance, "I am engaged to him."

She gave him a look of mock coquetry, and a dancing light shone in her eyes as he frowned faintly. She gave a little laugh.

"Did you think you knew some one else to whom I stand in the same relation," she asked, with her smile dying wistfully in her eyes.

He gave back her glance with a smile of measureless love and indulgence.

Nothing to-day was without its poetry to them, and their sharpened vision often saw it in the most unpromising objects.

Constance said she had always endowed trees with character. Each represented a sort of personality to her. The oak was the kindly father; the elm, the lithe, graceful daughter, and the maple, with its early foliage and swift, bloody dismantling, the prodigal son. She asked him to observe how the pines were constantly lifting their eyes and shrugging their shoulders.

“‘Oh, I don’t know,’ they seem to say,” she declared.

March found the perfect familiarity of their intercourse the most delightful thing he had ever known. He had been curious about the workings of this rare mind from their first meeting, and if he compared what he knew to what he did not know, he could not count himself much acquainted with it. Now it was seemingly wide open to him, and he wandered with a kind of rapture through its spacious, richly-furnished apartments. If it had depended upon him the ride would never have come to an end, but Constance, who we know had schooled herself, gently suggested that they turn, and they were presently galloping homeward.

“I must tell you,” she said, without preface, as the horses went at a walk up a hill, “that I am going away.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am going to New York to pay a visit to my aunt.”

“Not now?”

“Presently.”

“You can’t imagine how hard that is on me,” he said, quietly.

"I'm not bound to flatter myself in that way, am I?" returned she, with a smile that charmed him, despite the agitation of his thoughts.

"You are not bound to flatter me by considering my feelings at all," he said, gently, "but I hope you will."

"Surely. There are other considerations, however."

Her face was a little troubled.

"My dear girl, pray don't let me interfere with them. You know I believe in you always, whatever you do. I'm sure you have the best reasons."

"Yes, I think I have," answered Constance, thoughtfully.

"I shan't ask what they are."

"If you won't, please. They are excellent, as you say, but if you will trust me I won't repeat them. I can tell you though, that I have wanted to see New York again ever since I left it. Aunt Cynthia asked me to come when we left Judea together, and I have never ceased to include it among my plans."

"You can't go at some other time? You've no idea how precious these first days are to me."

"Ah, yes, I have! You must remember that I have a little measure of my own," she exclaimed, impulsively.

"But I shan't go for a fortnight yet," she added.

She gave him a look in which she allowed him to read something of her love, and her great pain in troubling him.

They had reached the summit of the hill, and March gave his horse a thoughtful cut with his whip. They galloped on for a few moments in silence, and then as the animals fell into a walk again at the foot of another hill,

"Constance, dear," said March, abruptly, "it's not Mr. Keator, is it?"

It came with overwhelming suddenness, and she was not able to restrain her quick blush, nor make the defence she had arranged.

"How Mr. Keator?" she asked, weakly.

"I mean you are not going from any fancied duty?"

"I don't know what you call fancied duty," returned she, difficultly. After a pause, she added, with a helpless gesture, "I'm going because I think I ought."

"Then you are obeying an obligation of conscience, and it is to Mr. Keator, since there is no one else. I don't ask you not to do it. You probably know best. But I entreat you to think well of it."

"Oh, I assure you I did not want to do it. They are all so kind to me."

She hesitated. For the hundredth time that day she was struck by the incongruity, the anomalousness of their situation. She wished to go on and add that it was a grievous thing to her to be obliged to go away from him, but she could not frame the statement in any language that seemed becoming. She could not have said all that was in her heart if they had been formally betrothed; but in the present singular posture of the affair she was unable to give her feeling even so much form as she felt she owed him.

"I am very sorry," she said, and endeavored to make her tone say all that she wished to put into words.

March caught the uncertain pleading in her voice, and, suddenly halting his horse, said, as she also paused and turned somewhat wonderingly to face him,

"Darling, you must not go. I don't know that I have any rights worth mentioning, but I mean to use all I have. I yielded at first because I thought it was your wish. But I see that you are only surrendering to a sense of duty.

It may be necessary—I am willing to trust your sense of that—but if either of us is to assume the obligation it must be I."

Constance eyed him for a moment in surprise. It was rather a wonder that she found her thought consenting so readily to his, than that he should take this tone of authority, which affected her. It was not so strange that he should command as that she should unconsciously, almost impassively, obey.

"You mean that you will go away?" she asked, at last.

"Certainly. You don't think that when it is simply a question of separation I can allow you to make the move. It is my duty, my privilege to go."

"But your work at Gerrit?"

"Lincoln can take charge of that. Was it that you were considering? Be careful; I shall begin to believe you really care for me."

Constance blushed.

"You know I was interested before——"

"Would it have occurred to you then to go away to keep me there? No, let us leave it the other way. The effect upon my conceit is most mischievous, but let us take the risk."

"Oh, if you insist!" yielded she, with a little laugh.

"Insist is an ugly word. I go away to return when I have your permission. That is all. Only make the time as short as possible."

"I gave my promise to Mr. Keator in May," mused Constance. "A year from that! It will be a long time."

"Do you mean to keep me away until then?"

"Do you think I wish it? But it's due—due Mr. Kea-

tor and myself. You may say I owe something to you. I'm willing to acknowledge that debt—afterward."

"It will be a miserable time for me. I don't pretend to deny that. But if I may claim you at last I could wait twice as long. I shall have that to sustain me. Poor Keator! He has not even that consolation."

"Where shall you go?" asked Constance, solicitously. He gave her an inquiring glance.

"Home—shall I not? You are giving me time. I shall need some one to talk with about you, and I want to make you familiar to my mother before I bring you to her."

Constance's cheek was swiftly dyed again. She glanced down.

"You are looking a long way ahead."

"That is all I shall have to console me. You wouldn't have me look at the present?"

"Don't see too much in the future."

"That won't be easy. You must remember that I see you in the midst of it."

Lincoln accompanied March to New York and saw him sail. In his law office he had fortunately not yet done so much business as to make its temporary abandonment costly; and when he had made certain arrangements regarding its disposition, he returned to Gerrit.

Constance did not attempt to conceal from herself the poignant sense of loss and absence which she felt after March's departure, and in the midst of this she found Lincoln's frequent and cheering presence a kind of benefaction. In his calls they talked chiefly of Gerrit (of which Constance deemed it a duty to secure the most full and accurate reports), and very frankly of March. When she allowed herself to dwell on this foremost figure in her

thoughts, she was often guilty of wishing that she had not sent him away—only, however, to make cordial repentance immediately. It was usually a pure satisfaction to her that she had been able to do such complete justice to her pledge, and it was with a singularly clear conscience that she set out with her aunt one day early in the new year for Judea.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONSTANCE turned the great key in the door of her old home with a melancholy pleasure. But when she had entered she went quickly from room to room. It was all the same. All her dumb friends among the furniture and pictures were waiting faithfully for her. Not a chair had been moved, not a painting changed. She had feared that the man in charge—or certainly his notable wife—would have altered and re-arranged in the German strife for neatness. But the dust had gathered and the cobwebs had been spun, it seemed, without interference. At this sight the inborn house-wife rose superior to the sentiment in her, and the permanence of everything was no longer sweet. It was the stability of the grave which weeds obliterate, she felt, as she went swiftly to the nearest window. She opened it and waited impatiently for the air and light to make themselves a home again in the musty rooms.

“Yes, aunt,” she begged, as Mrs. Echols glanced doubtfully at her, “open them, please! Open all you can! I feel as if the old house were reproaching me for having abandoned it so long.”

She sped down stairs and returned with a broom and a duster. The latter she gave her aunt, and retaining the first herself, assaulted the cobwebs with a kind of tender vigor. The two had not laid aside their bonnets

and mantles, and to the ignorant eye of a spectator their movements might not have looked wholly reasonable. To Mr. Keator, however, who came limping into the parlor when the war some moments later reached that region, they were quite intelligible. But the frequent sight of his sister engaged in this species of temporary belligerency, though it had accustomed, had not inured him to the stirring spectacle, and it seemed to him he would do as well to return at a more auspicious season. He was turning away from the door, with this thought, when Constance caught sight of him, and, dropping her broom, came swiftly to him with both hands outstretched and her illuminating smile upon her lips.

"Ah, Mr. Keator!" she exclaimed, joyously, as he took his hand from his crutch to be free to receive her double clasp, "I'm so glad! I *hoped* you would see us and come up at once."

She led him to a sofa draped in its fatigue costume of brown holland, introducing her aunt on the way.

"Surely you weren't going to let our broom and duster drive you off? We were only trying to make it seem more homelike, and that is unnecessary since you have come."

She pointed her pretty flattery with a kindly smile, and she did not see the look of happiness that possessed the minister's face as she went on.

"How can I say how glad I am to see you again, Mr. Keator? I've been trying to make it all seem natural here at home. It seems perfectly natural now."

She began to ask him many questions. How was the garden looking? She had not yet been out to see. And the oleander—was it still alive? Did the Sieckel pear tree yield as abundantly as usual? Who owned

her father's old horse "Fancy" now? Had the man who bought her kept her, and had he treated her well? Benicia—was she still with him? Was Sister Zelda as briskly as usual? Constance found time between her rapid questions to wonder that so many interests remained to her in Judea.

Mr. Keator sat fingering his crutch, answering as well as he might, and gazing absorbedly at her unconscious face.

"And your sister?" asked Constance, suddenly. "Some one tells me that you have been importing a sister, Mr. Keator. Where have you kept her hidden? You never said anything about her."

"She was so far away and I did not expect her soon then."

"It must be a great pleasure to have her with you. Please tell her how glad we shall be to know her. What is her name?"

"Rose," answered Mr. Keator, abstractedly, keeping his impotent eyes on her face.

"Rose—Rose Keator. What a pretty name!"

"She will be very happy to call," said the minister, formally.

Constance paused abruptly and regarded him in thoughtful absence. His glance was turned toward Mrs. Echols, whom he began to ask some perfunctory questions. She was not thinking as she looked at him of his unfailing courtesy, of which this polite inquiry was one of the examples. She had suddenly come to the end of her queries, and she was conscious that she had prosecuted them rather as a means of defence than for the satisfaction of her curiosity. She asked herself what she had found it necessary to defend herself against,

and the instant answer caused her to accuse her imagination for its failure to warn her. She had given no thought to this meeting with Mr. Keator, and she felt that her manner wore rather obviously the air of having been manufactured to meet an exigency. Those who have made her acquaintance will understand that this was of all things disturbing to her.

"You have come back to see about the hospital?" asked Mr. Keator, turning again to her, "or have you been better advised? You know Miss Van Cleef's plan," he added to Mrs. Echols. "It was my endeavor to discourage her when she proposed it. It seemed like doing too much."

"She does it for her father. You must remember that. In that way you won't think she can do too much," Mrs. Echols returned, with her courteous smile.

"But it comes to the Church——"

"The Church may blush as a matter of form, said Constance, "but you must take it. There is no question—there need not be ; need there, Mr. Keator?"

"We can't prevent your gift, I suppose, if you are determined," he said, with a smile ; "and, I think, I can make the elders see—yes, I may promise their assent, I believe."

Mr. Keator had not made Constance's proposition known, and in his inmost heart he was aware that some difficulty might be made about her standing in the Church. He took the burden cheerfully on his shoulders, and he did not permit them to suppose that it existed.

They talked for a long time of the hospital, especially canvassing the proper site, and when he rose to go, Constance said,

"I shall have to leave it all to you, Mr. Keator. It is

pleasant to take up the old custom of relying on your generosity."

She gave him a look which she meant to express all the kindness and sympathy for him that was in her heart. She had always greatly liked him, and in this renewal of their intercourse she liked him more than ever. How much this feeling may have had to do with compassion for a situation whose peculiar misery, until she saw him, she seemed never to have fairly felt, need not be ventured. It is certain that she found herself often during their talk picturing the months that he had passed since her departure. If the passion whose strength she could not doubt had not yielded to his severe resolution, what months they must have been! Her fancy furnished her with no adequate idea of them, she was sure, but the sense of this only made them the more pitiful. All this she tried to make her expressive face say in bidding him good-morning. She may have trusted too much to the fineness of Mr. Keator's perceptions. This was what she thought when she saw the answering look on his face.

The truth was she had taken too little into account the weak, man nature which no vows or obligations can quite overthrow. In his glance she read with terrifying clearness the history of the few months she had tried to imagine—all the resistless love and longing, the unbending will to conquer and the loathing of the carnal nature that would not down. She wondered why she had not seen before in the haggard lines of his face what it had cost him. It was a look that would have frightened one less discriminating. Constance was only sympathetically appalled at the retrospect. For the future she saw, or thought she saw, in his look the assurance of ultimate

victory. She was shaken by the passion that glowed upon her from his eyes ; but she thought of the integrity behind it—an integrity which in all her acquaintance with him had never failed for more than the instant in the garden, and felt calmly secure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. KEATOR left the house and walked toward his home with a bitter consciousness teasing his faithful intention. The serene heights to which he fondly fancied he had climbed seemed sinking under him. The quiet strength which he had trusted that he had gained through Rose's presence and his assiduous self-abasement was the infant's strength when the need came to face her. He had a despondent perception that he had been building a house of cards which was weakly settling about him. As he saw this emotion of the moment begin to set crumbling all his long-erecting, wearily-built structures, he felt wretched and ashamed. It seemed cruel, and for an instant he found frowardness to question the Providence which had sent her again into his path. In his quick repentance he saw what seemed to him a clear design to make his trial more searching, and he said to himself, as he silently besought strength to bear it, that he deserved all and more.

"You have seen her!" exclaimed Rose, as she helped him off with his coat in the hallway of the parsonage.

She sought anxiously in her brother's face for the signs of her fear, and believed that she found them.

"It has troubled you," she said, with swift deduction. "Oh, it is too bad that she should come back to make you miserable again."

Mr. Keator forced a smile.

"Do I look miserable? No, Rose," he told her, as he stroked her cheek, "she is come upon a better mission than that. She is to build us a new hospital, you know."

"But if she tears down all your buildings in the process?" lamented the girl with unconscious repetition of his metaphor.

Mr. Keator shrank at this arraignment of his inward fear, but he said, summoning a smile again, with effort,

"We shall have to put an extra prop or two under the walls—that is all. We shall get along, I think. I shall be more tempted—yes. But I wish to be tempted, you know."

"How can I ever doubt you?" said Rose, as they went into the library together. "It is not really a doubt. All my knowledge of you teaches me so much better!"

Mr. Keator seated himself rather wearily, and she sank beside him on her accustomed hassock.

"Remember that it is always my love that forms it," she went on. "Sometimes it must seem strange to you, John."

"Do you think I never doubt myself?"

"Ah, that is your great weakness—your modesty. There's nothing you mightn't do if you believed more in yourself."

The minister sighed.

"Nay, say rather that there is nothing I might not do if I believed more in the saving force of my highest self—the self that was in Christ."

Rose went to call on Constance the following day. The holland cerements had been lifted from the furniture, and the ladies had spent the morning in finding a servant, Mrs. Echols being still out upon that mission.

The discussion of that privileged class, which among women makes such a fortunate stop-gap topic of conversation as men find in politics, found for the two a ready road to good acquaintance. Rose told of her own trials with Benicia in her vivacious fashion. As she sat in her Moravian costume upon the sofa talking gayly, she reminded Constance of a French painting she had once seen. This represented a frolicsome peasant girl who had dressed herself as a nun and was secretly exhibiting her profane masquerade to a sympathetic group. Not that the cap and kerchief and gown of gray seemed discordant with the fair figure before her ; on the contrary, there was both a mysterious propriety in her dress and a justifying naturalness in such a manner as an accompaniment of it.

Constance did not understand it. She recalled her old feeling about herself : that her costume and her bearing refuted each other. Yet Rose, who certainly had not what the superficial observer would have thought the Moravian air, seemed in some way to have succeeded in making her dress and her manner very good friends. Constance wanted to tell her that she was fortunate.

Rose had not at all come to exhibit herself, and she might have been modestly troubled by Constance's speculations if she had been made acquainted with them. She had called chiefly because she believed that Mr. Keator wished it, and also, it must be owned, from an impulse of curiosity to know the girl who had brought such havoc into her brother's quiet life.

Rose, being a woman, was nothing if not partisan, and all her charity had not availed to bring her into a favorable mood for this meeting. She could not help thinking Constance to blame in refusing her love to her brother ;

and then in making the happiness, which might, nevertheless, have come to both of them, impossible, by her deafness to the warning that would have prevented the rebuke in the church. It was, therefore, with a species of resentful curiosity that she came to take a look at Constance.

She meant merely to take a look and depart; but Constance's warm greeting, her frank readiness to like her for her brother's sake, her alluring manner won upon her. She could not resist the amiable thirst to be liked, which Constance's face expressed at the moment, and expressed so rarely. Rose found herself flattered out of her umbrage, and at length saw herself repentantly endeavoring to do away with the impression she fancied her first reserve might have created. They talked of many matters, all of which seemed to have some subtle relation to Mr. Keator; for Rose had the sense of his centrality in the revolution of things which we find so pretty in a young wife touching her husband.

At last they came to speak directly of this subject of her eloquence, and Rose tried, without the malice which must have tinged the effort a few moments before, to give her hearer a sense of his nobility. She could not resist the glad feeling of gratification which stole over her as Constance joined in this celebration of her brother's virtues. It overthrew and put to shame all her secret theories, but in her pleasure she did not mind that. She said with *naïveté* that she could not imagine any one failing to love him. Constance assented quickly, and added that other men were like the mediocre paintings, touching which there might be a thousand differences, but that Mr. Keator was like a master's picture, about which no one could hesitate.

Then at length Rose understood. With a pang for which she found no excuse, she reached the entire comprehension she had refused to gain from her brother's modesty. She admired him—that was it—admired him distantly as she would a work of art ; her liking for him was for the pleasure which he gave her, not for the pleasure which she might give him. That was the essence of love ; and Rose perceived with a clearness against which there was nothing to urge, that there was not a particle of that sentiment for him in her breast. She evidently esteemed him too much to love him. It seemed to Rose that she ought to be glad of this, and at least she relieved Constance of all reproach. This girl, to whom she had come without amiability, understood him ; of that she was confident. And what could be more satisfying ? It was perhaps because she had clung, until the moment, with the persistence of romance, to the hope that in spite of seeming obstacles all might yet work together for their happiness with each other, that she felt a twinge of reluctance in letting go her hold of the possibility. But she went home with a lighter heart than she had carried to the old house, and she took an early opportunity to make one or two admissions to her brother.

No one knew—even Rose, with all her sympathies stretched toward his trouble, did not guess the rending pain that tortured every moment of Mr. Keator's waking hours after Constance's coming and haunted his dreams. He did not fall to pitying himself ; he did not blame circumstances. But he grew to hate the infirmity which would not suffer him to rest.

A man of less severe training and less rigorous habits of thought might have been able to shift the respon-

sibility for his condition, and to find consolation in the belief that the current into which he had chanced to drop, the direction of fate, the accidents outside his power—accidents which had drawn him into relation with Constance, and without his will, had brought about and left upon his hands his present intolerable position—were irresistible agents, nullifying his personal force. But nothing was more accurate than Mr. Keator's conscience. He could not have cajoled it if he had wished to, and these poor sophistries were as impossible to him as a deliberate falsity.

It had been his life business to seek out and publish the ways of sin, to warn against Satan's devices and to brand them relentlessly. It was not now the time, since he had become the sinner, to blind his lucid vision. He did not shrink from characterizing his wrong ; indeed, he found a melancholy pleasure in excoriating himself.

The clear sight which showed him the sin showed as pitilessly its penalty, and his conscience crucified him daily in agonies of which no words can give adequate sense. Her potent presence had melted his firm resolves and swept away all that he had gained before a week had passed. The innumerable plans and preparations for the hospital, and—when it was begun,—the consultations that inevitably went on between them, kept them in the most intimate association.

He was forced to sit or walk beside her for many hours each day, and to talk of architecture or of indifferent matters while one thought burned momentarily for utterance. At times, in the rapture of his love, it seemed to him that he must take her in his arms ; as he sat with her, the temptation to snatch the slim, fair hand that lay outlined against her dark gown, almost within his touch,

was scarcely resistible. He had only to say the few fatal words and she was his ; and they hung so insistently on his tongue that often they had almost said themselves.

It is not strange that he grew half reckless. He looked into her intoxicating face, and all obligations that kept him from her grew insignificant. Yet for any reason or no reason, he had always the saving feeling of the impossibility of final failure ; while out of the sense of present weakness one thing always stood—his integrity. It had never been questioned ; until the fatal hour when his trial had begun in the arbor in the garden, it had sternly never been allowed to fail. Save for that momentary weakness it was intact, and was it not still his ? It presented itself as something worth living and struggling for, even if he could forget the abundant spiritual rewards to which his conflict looked. He constantly pricked himself with the recollection of what it would cost him to lose the consciousness of that. Reluctance to forfeit his self-respect was indeed lower than the highest motive he could have wished to guide him ; but when the moon is not out one may be glad to walk by the light of the stars.

The consolations of his faith were still his, but the grievous sin which he felt himself to be daily committing often so weighed upon him that he was ashamed to use them. How could he ask forgiveness for a fault of which, fortify himself as he might, he was certain he must again be guilty the following day ? In the church he offered up the usual prayers. Some of them seemed framed for his trouble ; and an observant ear might have detected his wishful stress upon the words of the *Pater Noster*—“lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER man might have taken the coward's refuge in retreat. But for every reason that was impossible to Mr. Keator. If he could have brought himself to such poltroonery, he could hardly have left his work. Vacations were not frequent among the Moravian ministers, and he had recently been granted such a respite. But the consideration which held him back, when occasionally in desperation he sought any way out of this form of daily torture, was his sense of what he owed to Constance's generosity. She had given him this period of probation, and at whatever cost of pain to himself he must refuse to cheat it of its efficacy. His final conquest would by so much the more have attained the object for which she had munificently given her promise. But the struggle was bitter! He had supposed himself tried before, and, alas! had fancied himself almost conqueror. By comparison, while she was still securely remote, his burden had scarcely deserved the name. In these days of acute suffering, to hear her name spoken was to be shamed by the pursuing wish; to pass her dwelling, as he was obliged to do many times daily, was to be maddened by remembrance of the ease with which he might gain the happiness for which every fibre of his torn spirit longed.

His personal difficulties did not cause him to falter in his Church work. On the contrary, he plunged more fervently into every task which he could pretend an obliga-

tion to undertake. The irresistible craving to busy his brain about concerns quite removed from his own pressed upon him ; he felt sometimes as if he must flee from his thoughts, and on these occasions often pained Rose by his rashness.

The genuine Winter was with them now. In the street a single deep rut served for a road, and before the houses the snow was monstrously massed by the brethren's conscientious shovels. Within, the frost tapestries shadowed the window-panes, and the huge logs that painted fantasies in rose-color on them in the twilight, again made the hearth the central point in the brethren's homes. It was in weather like this that Rose found it needful to beg her brother not to attempt the drive to Little Slab Hollow. This was a village fifteen miles from Judea, where a man who had formerly been one of his flock lay seriously ill. He had left Judea three years before on the world's business, as the brethren called it. It had, at all events, not been Moravian business, and his name had been sorrowfully erased from their books. Now, in his failure and distress, Mr. Keator knew that he would not venture to send for him. When, therefore, word came to him of his illness, he did not hesitate before the opportunity which he saw to rescue a soul. It is true that when he was secure against Rose's importunities, slipping quickly out of Judea in a sleigh, he owed to himself, grieving, that his motive had not been a perfectly single one. It was impossible to deny that he was glad to escape from the brooding reflections which this evening had cost him more than the ordinary pain.

Constance, who had intimated at her arrival that her stay would be brief, had now determined to remain a week longer than she had intended, that she might at least see

the hospital outlined. The ground when she came had been less firmly frozen than is usual in early January, and the work had been begun. The recent snow had given pause to the building, however, and the young foundations were buried where only the January thaw could search them out. It was for this somewhat mythical occurrence that Constance had decided to wait, and her decision was giving Mr. Keator a kind of sweet anguish.

He was glad that she was to stay longer. How should he not be? The future after her departure was a black void in his account. He hesitated to look into it, and it was hard to imagine himself bearing it. But it was not toward this that his quick fear went out when she told him of her intention. He at once said to himself that he would willingly face the result if she would but go away—immediately, without an hour's delay.

As his mind leaped forward in imagination to this added week, he was for the first time fearful of himself. He began to doubt ever so faintly his ultimate triumph. He had been sorely tempted. He had long felt himself to be at the edge of a precipice, he had known that he was in danger; at times, perhaps, he had been nearer yielding than he knew. But unconsciously, obscurely, from what source he knew not, he had been buoyed by the faith that utter failure was impossible. In her presence it had seemed to him, as each moment succeeded the last, that he must surely fail, and yet each moment passed and the next found him as before.

It is not easy to say how it was—it may have been due to the blameless life behind that would not be so belied, or perhaps merely to his obstinate hope—but, through it all, something had given him intangible assurance that,

tempted as he might be, such unthinkable ruin could not befall him, such an annulling of all his work, such a denial of the faith by which he had lived, Heaven would not permit to overtake him. But as he looked forward to another such week of close association as those bitterly sweet weeks just past, his confidence was shaken ; he reckoned with his remaining strength, and feared for it.

With these thoughts burdening his mind, it was a blessed relief to feel the motion of the sleigh under him, to take the keen air beating against his cheeks, even to find an occupation in being thoroughly cold.

The man at Little Slab Hollow was very low with fever, but his heavy eyes had still the intelligence of his shame as Mr. Keator bent over him.

"You were pardoned long ago, Dinkel," said the minister, taking his hand before he could begin to excuse himself. "We never cherished any ill will against you. We were only grieved that you were led to do it."

"Led !" exclaimed the man, hoarsely, willing to accept the charitable construction. "That is a kind word—led. But it's the truth. I wouldn't have gone for to do it myself. It was a man I met in the world," he groaned. "I suppose I was a good subject. I was sort of restless, and he put the devil's thoughts into me. It wasn't easy to do. I was fond of the Church. And so I didn't go far—only down to Maryland. I thought maybe I might want to come back some day, and it's turned out so."

"Well, well, Dinkel, that is all settled now," said Mr. Keator, soothingly, for the man had somehow got upon his elbow in his excitement. "Don't agitate yourself. I want to talk to you about other things."

With his thoughts constantly elsewhere, command

them as he might, Mr. Keator endeavored to prepare this errant soul for death. At last the man fell asleep with a peaceful smile upon his lips. The minister sat watching him. Once or twice the landlady of the inn, at which, working his way back to Judea, the traveller had fallen ill, came in to look at him and to ask if there was anything she could do.

Dinkel woke at length uneasily and asked for water. Mr. Keator brought it. As the dying man looked into his eyes—"Is it all the same up at the settlement? Would I know it?" he asked, pitifully.

"All the same. Nothing is changed." But after a moment, with a pang of recollection of his own, he added: "A hospital is being built near the Sisters' Choir-house. You remember where it stands?"

"Oh, I don't forget!" he moaned. Then, with the irrelevance of his wandering thoughts: "Are you sure they forgive me?" he asked.

Mr. Keator made the required confirmation, and the man relapsed into a vacant silence, keeping his eyes on the unceiled rafters above his head.

"Where is the society getting the money?" he asked, musingly, after a long pause, without turning his face.

"For what?"

"Hospital," he answered, briefly.

Mr. Keator struggled with the simple words.

"From Miss Van Cleef," replied he, after a moment.

"The doctor's daughter—she that went South?"

"The same," assented Mr. Keator, laconically.

His thoughts had reverted to Constance. It was several minutes before Dinkel interrupted them.

"Yes, I went South myself," he murmured, beginning to wander a little; . . . "saw her there."

In his absorption it had not occurred to Mr. Keator to wonder how Dinkel knew of Constance's departure from Judea. He asked his question of him now, impulsively.

"At Quinnimont?"

"Gerrit."

Mr. Keator said to himself that he did not know she had travelled in the South. He permitted himself to inquire the whereabouts of Gerrit.

"March," said Dinkel, with effort. "Mr. March—you know him?"

Mr. Keator wound his fingers about his crutch. Constance, with no active wish to keep the intelligence from him, yet with a kind of shrinking from telling it, had not informed him of March's return, and, of course, had found no reason to give him other facts concerning her English lover. She was acquitting herself of all possible obligation to her duty in the matter. It was characteristic that she should feel a right to her reserve. But the news would have been more agreeable from her.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Keator, "where was he?"

He might have spared himself the trouble of hiding his intense interest, for Dinkel saw nothing.

"Gerrit—his place—colony," he answered, confusedly.

Mr. Keator remembered March's project of a colony very well. They had often talked it over together. At the neighborhood of this colony to Constance's residence he tried not to wonder. He said to himself that it was a mere chance; such things were always happening. But he did not ask less eagerly,

"And—and Miss Van Cleef? Was she there?"

The man turned toward him, faintly roused by his eagerness.

"Yes," he said, reasonably. "She used to come over from Quinnimont."

"She—she was interested in the colony?" asked Mr. Keator.

The man smiled faintly in spite of his failing strength. Mr. Keator thought it a devil's smile.

"Mr. March . . . interested her," answered Dinkel, difficultly, but in a tone of suggestion for which the minister, in his sudden passion, could have choked him.

"How dare you?" cried Mr. Keator, rising, in outrage.

"Every one knew," gasped the man, feebly.

Mr. Keator hobbled quickly to the window and looked out in nervous, helpless wrath. The sun made itself vaguely known upon the gray horizon, and he counted the chickens in the tree on which the casement looked, in his angry agitation. The cock began to bestir himself drowsily and set up his crow, while the minister's thoughts went in desperate iteration over this intelligence. A thousand fancies beset him; he tried hard to reason it out to Constance's credit, to something which need not torture him with its mere suggestion. He could not suffer himself to believe what the man's words seemed to say. He clung with the tenacity of despair to all that he knew of Constance; he asked himself what he knew of her that was not admirable, and would not admit the ghastly suggestion born of his own experience: she doubtless trusted his uprightness as implicitly still as he had always trusted hers; and what wickedness was not even now knocking at his breast?

He turned wearily from the window. It suddenly seemed to him gross to accept this man's wandering words against all his knowledge of her. It discredited

her. He sharply resolved not to allow himself an evil thought of her until he could do her the poor justice of confronting her with the story. He would not so much as inquire further of the man who lay before him. It seemed like treason now. He went over and bent above him. Then suddenly he knelt beside the pallid form and prayed for pardon in an agony of abasement. He had made his heart a nest for malice and given nameless passions welcome, while the spirit which it was his office to console had fled.

WHEN HE reached home a little after breakfast-time, Rose met him on the doorstep. She hesitated at his haggard face. Her own was full of wistful intelligence.

"You have been up all night!" she cried, reproachfully.

Then, leading him into the parlor, to which the vacant fireplace and the drawn curtains gave a dreary look, she faced him with an indescribable look of grief and pain. He observed that she was pale, and began to wonder vaguely why she had brought him here. But he was wearied by all that he had undergone since he had left home, and he sank into the nearest chair, while she absently took his crutch, from habit. He looked at her again as he drew off his gloves with a faint sigh, and observed her expression more curiously.

"What is it, dear?" he asked. His fatigue made the question languid. "Why have you brought me in here?"

"Oh, how shall I ever tell you!" exclaimed Rose, all her trouble in her eyes.

"What is it? has anything befallen——"

"No, it is not she," returned the girl, with a scorn she

did not attempt to repress. "It is you, brother ; only you !"

She crept with a soft murmur to his feet.

"Ah, how can I tell you how sorry I feel for you, John !"

He took the letter that she had pushed toward him and marvellingly opened it. Suddenly she snatched the sheet from him and, unfolding it, indicated huskily :

"There ! there !"

It was from one of Rose's English friends, and with the cruel casualness of gossip it mentioned the engagement of the son of Sir John March—Rose must have heard of him ; he had visited Judea and knew her brother—to an American girl, a Miss Van Cleef.

Rose was frightened at the pallor which stole over her brother's face as he read. He dug his nails into the flesh as he ran over the brief sentences twice. It seemed as if he would never finish. Then he asked hoarsely for his crutch. All his languor was gone as he rose with grief and anguish in his face. His breath came in quick gasps, and his eyes were lighted with a blaze of passion such as Rose had never known in all her experience of her gentle brother. She wished bitterly that at any cost she had kept it from him.

She clasped her hands.

"Where are you going ?"

His face was thunderous.

"Can you ask ?" he cried.

"Don't, brother, don't !" exclaimed Rose, with the courage of her fear.

In the midst of his passion he stooped and kissed her.

"Don't fear, little sister ; don't fear ! Do you think I would hurt her ?"

A look of disdain passed over his face.

"Remember that you once loved her!" she whispered.

"Once!" cried the minister. Rose was quelled and beaten down by the sudden light of piteous love and longing in his eyes.

She tremblingly followed him to the door, but her lips refused to shape what she wished to say. With the impulse of her habitual care-taking for him, she threw his great-coat over him, while he fumbled at the rack for his hat; but she feared to oppose herself to him as he rushed by her without a word and out into the rising storm.

She stood in the doorway with the snow falling, and watched him solicitously as he made his rapid way against the wind. Once she reached out her hand and called, but the wind took her voice and swept it down the street, and her arm dropped aimlessly at her side. She did not know what she wished or what she feared, but his swift limp was charged to her distressed vision with a kind of relentlessness which made her tremble for its purpose. Her eyes anxiously pursued his frail figure struggling against the storm until he ascended the steps which would lead him into Constance's presence. Then a gust filled her straining eyes with powdered snow, and she turned away with a bitter pang.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE wise hesitate to kindle the anger of a gentle spirit. They know that habitually passionate men are never shaken by such rage as, upon rare provocation, visits a just and even temper. We see what strength and sweep all passion, through its unwontedness, has with good men when by chance they are touched by its hot breath ; but the anger of a good man has another power in being righteous. In common it is born of a real wrong, and when a man begins ever so slightly to feel himself part of the machinery of avenging heaven we know what blows he deals.

Mr. Keator, as he read for the second time the letter which Rose showed him, was devoured by a kind of madness—the madness in which peaceful men do murder. He could have borne either Dinkel's intelligence or Rose's alone. He could have forced himself to disbelieve either. But the thorn with which the dying man had tortured him was pressed quickly home by his sister, and a great rage took possession of him. A wild, fleeting lament for the end he instantly foresaw to his trial swept through him ; he felt, as one feels in a dream a fall which one cannot arrest, that all was lost ; and then he shook himself and went forth to right the wrong she had done him.

As he went lamely along the street the sentences with which he meant to sting her began to shape themselves in his mind with horrid fertility. He wished to hurt her.

It was very simple, what he had to say. It could be done quickly. But he longed, with an incredible longing, for a man whose mercy a few hours before included all the world, and who had never been able to hurt an insect, to make every word a wound. These wounds must be gentle, though. He reminded himself of that. They must be like steel-thrusts that creep swiftly through the flesh, and only make their pang known as the knife is withdrawn.

As he raised the knocker of her door he shuddered, and a momentary loathing for what he was about to do overcame and sickened him. But he scorned the emotion with a forced smile, and, taking the brass figure of the reclining lamb serving as a knocker, in his hand again, stoutly sent its summons through the almost empty house. He went up the step and past the woman who came to the door without a word.

"Miss Van Cleef," he said, briefly, as he began to rub his snow-covered boots upon the mat.

The girl vanished silently, keeping her wondering eyes on the minister's passion-charged face.

Constance found him in the centre of the parlor. She went quickly to him with the smile she kept for him, and took his listless hand.

"You do not look well," she said, as she pushed a chair toward him. "I don't wonder, after such a drive. What made you take it, Mr. Keator? But I needn't ask."

She seated herself and awaited his answer with a memory of her smile upon her lips.

Mr. Keator did not sit down. A sense of the bitter contrast between her manner and his inward thoughts made him shudder. But he turned toward her with a blank look as she asked about his drive.

"I went down with aunt last night to call on your sister. That is how I knew," she said, vivaciously, in reply to his look.

"I am glad you called," returned the minister, vaguely. "I want you to know her."

"You can't wish it so much as I do."

"No, I think I wish it more," quietly opposed he, drawing nearer to her.

He felt his quick heart-beats shaking the hand with which he leaned upon his crutch, as he stood before her. Suddenly his lips compressed, and he said with a calmness which even to him was frightful,

"I have determined to make her your sister as well."

The blood fled from Constance's face, and she sat staring at him in helpless amazement and alarm.

"I have come," he said, "to ask you to fulfil your promise."

He would have given much at the moment to lend to his tone the indignation of his scorn for her imagined treason. But he could scarcely raise his voice above a whisper.

If he wished to make a visible effect upon Constance he was not disappointed. She still sat staring at him in stony wonder. He was fascinated and then half appalled by her fixed gaze. What could be her thoughts? He turned away, setting his teeth. He tried to feel that she was suffering properly; that she deserved it. But his lively love would not permit him to exult in her pain; instead, he found himself foolishly pained with her, and, irresistibly impelled, glanced again toward where she sat. Until he died Mr. Keator did not forget the heavenly look of pity on her relaxed and shining face. It beamed from it in a soft glory, and seemed to make an atmos-

phere about him. He sat down with a sudden giddiness.

"You do not mean it! Say you do not mean it, Mr. Keator!" she was crying.

With all his indignation in his voice the minister answered,

"I should be guilty of a falsehood. I never meant anything more positively."

A look of anguish crossed Constance's face.

"You have considered?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"I have considered," repeated Mr. Keator, unyieldingly.

She gazed at him a moment in perplexed dread. A lump hung in her throat. She could not speak. But she commanded herself proudly.

"You make your request suddenly," she said, with a wan smile. "Give *me* time to consider." But after a moment she cried wearily, "Ah, it's no use! I come around always to the same thing. I don't understand," she exclaimed, passing her hand over her eyes in a dazed way.

"You can understand that you are under an obligation," he said, with effort. "I ask you to fulfil it."

"Obligation!—fulfil!" she whispered, bewilderedly. "Forgive me for repeating your words. I can't seem to make them real to myself. I—I know what you mean," she told him. "But I can't believe it is you who say it. This is not *my* Mr. Keator."

Despite his righteous anger the minister could not meet her unclouded eyes.

"It is a mask," she said. "Tear it away, Mr. Keator. I still believe in you."

"Do not venture to talk of *my* mask!" he answered,

hoarsely, as he rose and caught his crutch with an angry grasp.

Constance gazed at him in dumb horror.

"What *shall* I talk of?" exclaimed she, after a marvelling pause.

She also rose slowly and faced him.

"Talk of your pledge to me!" he cried, sharply. His mild eyes flashed. "Tell me whether you mean to keep it!"

The uncertainty, the perplexity, the wandering pity went out of Constance's face. She gathered herself and confronted him proudly.

"Did you think I would break my word?" she asked him, with scorn. "You are indeed not the Mr. Keator I have known and admired, and pinned my faith to. Don't suppose that I do not understand now," she went on, swiftly. "I never understood anything with such dreadful clearness. But you knew why I could not comprehend—why I would not. It was my faith in you. I could not believe it. It was the standard which you had given me. I could not think all your life, even at your bidding, a ghastly lie."

Mr. Keator shrank at the words, and she turned away for an instant to hide her shameful tears.

"You wrong me—you wrong me cruelly," he said, with sad calmness; but he would not bring his indictment against her. "One of us must forbear," he said to himself. And indeed he was too much grieved to speak.

"You are scarcely the one to speak of wrong," cried Constance in answer to him. "Is it no wrong to me that you win such a promise as that I gave, from my trust in you, only to abuse my good-will? I would give that promise again, Mr. Keator. Do not think I repent it.

But it would be not only because it would be sweet to help you ; but because of my faith that you would not suffer me to help you in a matter like that to my own cost."

Mr. Keator was touched. He could bear her indignation even when it seemed most genuine, but this half appeal searched his heart. Yet there was no gentleness in his voice as he said sternly,

"I was worthy of that faith. I had the right to it."

"Ah, was I not sure of that when we made our agreement there in the garden, Mr. Keator? But what shall I think now?" The minister turned away and bit his lip, while she went on as if with a fresh impulse. "Dear Mr. Keator," she said simply, "that agreement of ours was not a usual one. It was not one that a common man would have had your need for ; and—and perhaps not one that a woman who cared less for you would have consented to. *Oh!*" she cried, with a little deprecatory accent as she saw his flush. "I did not mean to say that—or at least not what that seems to say. I did not intend to say that it was generous, or fine in me. You can't think I have ever felt that."

"Do not cheapen it. It *was* fine," asserted Mr. Keator, without emotion.

"No, no ; it was not. It was what any woman would have done—if she knew you. But, Mr. Keator, it was not an ordinary contract—that to which we bound ourselves. That is what I am trying to say : and we are under obligation to each other to keep its terms by so much the more sacredly."

It was a sore temptation to retort upon her ; to ask how she had kept its terms. But Mr. Keator held his peace. He had grown afraid to speak. He had resolved

that he would not soil his lips with the charge which in his first anger he had meant to bring against her ; and if he spoke he did not know what he might say.

“ Ah,” cried Constance, at his silence, “ you do not care for that ! Am I wholly to lose my ideal Mr. Keator ? ”

Her ideal ! And what of his ? He smiled wretchedly. Again he did not answer. Her false seeming frankness, her hollow appeals were hardening him against her. He was so filled with abhorrence of her studied falseness that he began to find himself indifferent as to the issue of the question between them. He had come to make her pay a penalty ; but perhaps she was not even worth punishing. He turned away from her, weary at heart, while she went on.

“ Mr. Keator, do you remember how you took pains to picture this position to me before you would let me promise ? It was admirably fair and generous in you, I thought, at the time. I can almost remember the words. Wait a moment.” She glanced at him doubtfully as she repeated : “ ‘ Promise,’ you begged, ‘ that if I come to you and say I have failed—I have given up my ministry—I offer you a life beggared of everything that makes life worth while—of deliberate malice divorced from all good and noble things except my love—you will submit yourself to the lot.’ Do you remember, Mr. Keator ? And do you think it strange that I hesitate to believe you have fallen to that ? ”

Mr. Keator was greatly disturbed. As she began to repeat his words he had gone over and stood by the fireplace, holding his crutch in his hand and leaning an elbow against one of the supports of the high mantel. His face, as she finished, was bent upon his arm. He bit his lip and stared into the fire.

"I give you up," he said, at length, huskily.

He did not raise his head.

"What do you say?"

"I resign you. I surrender my claim."

"I can't let you do that," she returned, briefly.

He had thought that the occurrences of the last half hour had killed all his tenderness for her. But at this, with the fatuity of his love, he started and went toward her.

"Why, Constance? Why?" he asked, agitatedly.

"It is not"—she hesitated a moment, then dealt him the blow very gently—"for the reason you think."

Mr. Keator turned upon his crutch and went swiftly back to the fireplace.

"Pardon me," she begged; "I did not mean to wound you."

"Oh, I know! I know! I have always understood. Surely you have not left me in doubt. Only a fool's fancy could have deceived me, even for the instant."

Constance was pained, but she said, quietly,

"I was only about to say that since you have made the proposition it is for me to insist upon it. I cannot honorably allow you to retreat. I shall keep my word to the utmost letter."

Mr. Keator looked from side to side in restless misery. He took up his crutch, however, almost immediately and came over to where she sat, with the energy of her statement still alive in her eyes.

"Constance," he said, "have some pity. You do not know . . . Let things remain as if this had never been."

Constance shook her head with a troubled gesture.

"Things can never be as they were before," she answered.

"Is it that you wish to humble me before you yield?" He stretched forth his hand. "See, I beg it of you."

She turned away with tears in her eyes.

"Do you think nothing is due to me?" she asked, tremulously.

"Everything. I apologize. I abase myself. I will go away." A loathing for his part in the affair suddenly seized him. "How can I tell you how I hate myself when I think that I have allowed a wicked, momentary infirmity to triumph over my love for you? To have abused your faith in me, your noble generosity; to have lived to shock you by the cowardly use of a power you had given me! I can't tell you how it happened. God and his angels seemed to desert me. I came here in a sort of madness." He drew nearer to her. "You have the best right to your revenge," he said. "I ask you not to take it."

Constance had controlled herself again and answered with comparative calm,

"Don't attribute that motive to me, Mr. Keator. It is only justice that I am trying to do—justice to yourself and me. Heaven knows it's not easy. Pray don't make it harder! You have gone too far for either of us to retreat. We must leave it now with God."

She spoke solemnly, and with a determination which informed Mr. Keator's sensitive knowledge of her that the final word had been spoken. He turned away sick at heart.

It seemed a long time before he spoke again.

"Very well," consented he, hoarsely, at last. "I will see that the lot is tried at once."

Constance rose quickly, with a glad smile upon her

face, and held out both her hands. He limped forward to take them.

"Ah, there spoke *my* Mr. Keator !"

She smiled upon him and pressed his hands.

"Some day," she said, "I hope to be able to think of you as of old—as I did before—before this shock." She averted her head an instant. "But it would be mockery to say that I do now. You understand, and—and if this comes about—if the lot is favorable to you, you must not expect too much of me."

"I expect nothing. I ask nothing," answered Mr. Keator, with dignity. "Good-bye !"

He put forth his hand.

"Good-bye," returned she, absently.

He limped to the door. She remained standing as he had left her in the centre of the room. But as he reached the threshold,

"Mr. Keator," she called, softly, going after him.

"Yes."

He turned back.

"Do you think that God truly works through the lot ? Have you faith in it ?"

He looked long and hungrily at her. He did not answer, and for a moment she thought that she had wounded him again. But he replied at length,

"I think that He truly works through the lot. We are both safe in His hands. 'The lot is cast into the lap : but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.'"

Constance said nothing and after a moment she let him go.

But she went back into the room and flung herself upon a couch in an agony of tears, calling upon March's name.

Mr. Keator was horribly unhappy, and sore and grieved, as he went stumbling down the snow-piled street. He did not know that he had been spared the ultimate calamity. It would have killed him to see her grief for March.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FACTIOUS disposition had begun to display itself among the colonists at Gerrit within a month after March's departure. It was an ill-assorted company, and it would, perhaps, not have held together in any event. But March's going hastened the inevitable rupture. While he was among them, guiding, smoothing, energizing their daily work, the opposing elements were curbed. They respected his authority and tacitly owned their obligation of gratitude to him. For, in fact, March owned Gerrit undividedly, and they dwelt upon his land as his guests. They could not blind themselves to the generosity which had assumed all the risks ; and this made a bond of so delicate a nature that the hardest of them would have hesitated to break it while he was with them. Lincoln, it is true, was his lieutenant, and as such inspired a certain amount of respect ; but his authority wore smooth with the loss of novelty, and he began to find himself in a perplexing condition.

From Constance, before her departure, Lincoln had studiously concealed his difficulties ; and indeed the thriving village, set in its peaceful valley and filled with laborers constant in gathering home their first prosperous harvest, might very well have flattered the casual eye as a vision of contentment. Constance, at all events, went away untroubled by the forebodings which would have

tormented her had she known the real posture of the enterprise at Gerrit. After her arrival in Judea she received very regular reports of the progress of the colony. She had had at all times since March's departure, a sense of responsibility for its well-being. She felt more distinctly and weightily than she remembered feeling of any other commission, that it was her personal charge—a charge of which she greatly wished to render a good account. It was she who had sent March away, and if any failure befell because of that, whom else should she blame?

With this idea of her stewardship, she had asked Lincoln as an especial favor to keep her acquainted with all that went on within the little world of which he was governor *pro tempore*. Lincoln was, however, at first able to reconcile it with his theories of the friendly office to tell her somewhat less than all. His weekly letter had, indeed, twice contained vague hints of a dissatisfaction, which would doubtless soon be quelled. But nothing else had prepared her for the startling letter which she held in her hand as she sat at breakfast with her aunt on the morning following Mr. Keator's visit.

"Mr. Lincoln says," she told Mrs. Echols, as she thoughtfully folded the paper, "that there is a kind of mutiny in progress at Gerrit. Think how it will grieve him!"

Mrs. Echols did not ask for whom the pronoun might stand.

"It is not as if he were here," she admitted, with intelligence.

"No," repeated Constance, "it's not as if he were here. Oh, I trust it is not serious."

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed her aunt, with the unction

that the phrase has in the South. "It must have come up without warning," she added. "Mr. Lincoln would have written if it had been brewing long, I should think."

She looked questioningly at Constance. Her niece returned her glance with a hesitation born of her doubtful tone.

"I don't know," she said. "What do you think?" she begged, earnestly.

"You know better than I. You are almost a colonist yourself, dear. You ought to understand these things."

"Yes, yes; but I don't. Oh, aunt, I'm greatly troubled about it!" she exclaimed, in an alarmed perplexity not common with her.

She paused a moment, drawing the letter nervously through her fingers.

"You know how I feel!" she burst out.

"I can imagine," returned Mrs. Echols, sympathetically.

"Well, that's it. It's not my personal concern in the welfare of Gerrit so much as—— Oh, you know I sent him away! If anything happens through his absence, how can I ever forgive myself?"

"By remembering that you meant right, I hope, my dear. But that's not the question. Nothing must happen."

"Yes, that's what I think. But how——? Oh, aunt, let us go to-day."

"My dear child, what are you thinking of? I've just written Francis we should remain a week longer. We should surprise him out of a whole day's fishing."

"Don't throw obstacles in the way," she entreated, rising with determination. "I must go."

"What can we do?"

"Never mind. We will go. It will be a satisfaction to be there. It is intolerable to stay."

Mrs. Echols did not know of the occasion which lent anguishing weight to her niece's desire to leave Judea, but she perceived the genuineness of her anxiety, whatever its cause, and she was both too reasonable and too much attached to her to hinder her.

It was a crowded day, for their passage was to be engaged in the coach, and all that they had brought with them was to be packed. The furniture was also to be re-enshrouded, and the rooms once more neatly ordered and left to the friendship of the echoes. The burden which these cares imposed upon Constance was sufficiently severe, and when it was all over, the house closed, and their boxes and packages carried down and strapped upon the coach, she sank within that friendly refuge thoroughly exhausted.

As the landlord of the inn came out to give his last messages to the driver, her thoughts went back, despite her fatigue, to the time of her last departure from Judea. She recalled Mr. Keator's ignorant efforts for the comfort of her Aunt Cynthia and herself with a sad smile, and in her memory there rose with painful vividness the picture of the minister standing by the coach door, with her hand in his and his head bared. The eager look of fidelity and confident courage on his face returned to her with a pang. She remembered the strong, calm glance with which he had answered her foolishly trusting phrase, "You must not fail." And then he had said: "Not while you trust me." Surely she had trusted him, and for the fiftieth time she asked herself what had tempted him to this fatal lapse.

In the midst of her great misery on March's account,

and on her own, it may seem strange that she should have devoted much thought to this problem. But the long watches of the night before, in which she had been taught through mortal pain the intensity of her love for March, had instructed her to avoid the subject which engrossed all her womanly fears, and she was glad to occupy her mind with anything. She had grown absolutely afraid to challenge the future, to ask a question of the threatening possibilities of the coming week. The contingency to which she had yielded so readily before Mr. Keator, which, in her pride, she had forced, represented itself to her calmer thought as simply appalling. She had no idea of retreating ; but her fancy, when she let it play about the oracle which Mr. Keator was to invoke, filled her with dread.

Her concern was rather for March than for herself. How would he support an adverse decision of the lot ? Might he not justly accuse her ? She had warned him ; but if she had supposed this among possible events, ought she not to have done more ? She could not remember what she had thought when he had asked for her love ; she only knew that she had felt implicit faith in Mr. Keator. And yet as she looked about to find food for the self-accusation, which was a kind of desperate pleasure, it seemed an incredible innocence that she should not have foreseen that a man filled with such a passion as his must fail in the difficult temptation he had set himself. But she always returned to her old belief in him, and when she asked that to say how she could have suspected him of a wrong, under whatever trial, silence answered her. She knew that she could not have had less than the unquestioning confidence in him which he had abused ; and her feeling toward him, as constantly since their interview,

was one of honest grief for his fall rather than resentment for her own injury.

She could not help clinging to the frank liking and esteem for him, which seemed to have been immemorially part of her nature, and even in her anger she had known that something, which he would not say, extenuated his ruinous failure. Her imagination could not go so far as to offer a vision of herself as his wife when he should have abolished the Mr. Keator she had known by abandoning the ministry. She preferred rather to conjure herself back to the time when she had been able to look upon the spectacle of herself as his wife, at certain rare moments, with a vague, if alloyed, satisfaction ; when occasionally it had seemed to her that his persistence might some day accomplish its end for lack of rivalry.

But since then Mr. March had come, and love, with its gift of new eyes, had so belittled these easy theories that, as she looked back upon them, she used her compassion. The thought was fruitful in memories, and all her memories seemed to be full of March. As the bitter fear that he was now forever lost to her recurred, notwithstanding her resolve, she gave herself up to the luxury of her sorrow, and tried to think that the treasured fact of love, even renounced love, would always console her pain. But at the moment it was itself a far too painful thought to be long pursued. She found time, however, to upbraid herself for the pride which had hidden from him the full measure of her affection and to determine, that if, when they met again, she was not Mr. Keator's wife he should know how incomparably dear he was to her. She was suddenly seized, from she knew not whither, with the whimsical fancy that she should find him at Quinimont. He had come as unexpectedly

before. She longed to cast some of her wearisome burden upon him. In his presence it seemed to her that she should be strong for anything the future held.

She tried to scorn the hungry wish. But next day when they found Lincoln awaiting them in the coach-yard, a feeling of desolate disappointment came over her when she saw that March was not standing beside him. As Lincoln drove them to the house in which Constance had spent so many happy days, and in which love had first come to her, a premonition of a future crowded with undesired gifts of days which would have lost all value, weighed upon her. The happy days seemed permanently over ; perhaps this was what older people meant by experience. It was certainly not what she had meant ; but she remembered how she had sighed for it even if it should prove all wounds. So far it had been very generous to her, and she bravely said to herself that she must take the evil with the good. Here was an opportunity to show that she had been in earnest in her willingness to pay for experience at any price ; in her readiness to prove herself worthy to know life. She resolved to keep a good heart, come what would.

Lincoln told them that the trouble at Gerrit had somewhat subsided, but that he feared the dissension beyond remedy.

"I wish March were here !" exclaimed the young man.

"Yes, indeed," murmured Mrs. Echols, fervently ; but Constance only looked at him anxiously as he added,

"Perhaps he may come yet in time. That is what I have been hoping for. This difficulty began early in December—before your departure," he confessed, as he chirruped to the horse. "I thought it better not to write to you, but I did write March advising him to return at

once. As I reckon it, he could have been here almost a week ago with favorable winds ; but making every allowance he must be here within a few days. I should have given up the contest last week if I had not held on to that hope."

Constance, remembering his agreement with her, had a sober doubt ; yet her heart exulted even at the possibility.

On the second day after their arrival Lincoln came over to call upon them, and Constance was rejoiced, but not greatly surprised to see him accompanied by March.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONSTANCE never understood how Mrs. Echols and Lincoln so swiftly made known their mutual sympathy for the situation, and vanished from the room in which March found her ; but at the moment she was not inclined to question anything. She glided into his arms and sobbed out the story of her sorrows on his breast.

She went over the history of Mr. Keator's fall and of his demand upon her. Of the lot she had not spoken when she told him of her pledge in the fly gallery, and she did not venture yet to make known to him the arbitrament to which she had entrusted her fate and his.

March was, however, too much occupied with the pleasure of seeing her again to make far-reaching inquiries, or even to trouble himself as much as might have been expected regarding the main disaster. Indeed he could find heart to be glad to see her overtaken by an infirmity so little part of her usual disposition. His love was founded upon his sense of her unlikeness to other women ; but with the curious illogic of the passion he was glad to find her like other women in her womanliness. Her weakness endeared her to him, and the affection which he had curbed for months overflowed in his caresses. Just then it was the richest privilege in the world to comfort her, and he did not suffer his connection with the cause of her grief to chasten his pleasure.

"Hush, darling, hush !" he whispered, as she finished

her recital. "What difference does it make? You still care a little for me, don't you?"

She held him off quickly with a light of passionate devotion in her eyes that told him more than he had hitherto been allowed to know. It touched him with rapture.

He folded her in his arms.

"Then, dearest, there is no other fact in the world. How greedy we should be to ask anything more!"

He smiled upon her as she looked up at him.

"Oh, no, no!" she vaguely denied.

But the glorified light on her face did not fade, and she devoured his glance with an almost fearful trust.

"I haven't told you," he said, as he led her to the sofa. "My mother is charmed. As for my father"—he paused with a smile—"my father has given me an excellent precedent for marrying an American."

"I fear you'll never marry this one," she whispered, with a pained little laugh.

"You don't know her nor me," March returned, with a fond pressure of her hand.

"But, Mr. Keator!"

"Yes," owned March, thoughtfully. "Mr. Keator!"

"You can't fancy how I have longed to see you since it happened!"

"You don't blame me, then?"

"Blame you!"

"I hesitated to break our agreement. Nothing less imperative than this trouble at Gerrit would have brought me over."

"I don't need proofs of your truth and loyalty," she said, "and I did need *you*. So they did at Gerrit. I cared almost as much that you should come for that as

for me. I can't forgive myself that it should have happened, but if you had not come in time I could never have forgiven you."

"Did you feel your charge so much as that, dear?" he asked. "I should have abandoned the experiment before I left if I had supposed it would burden you so. It would merely have hastened the end."

"Why—why, you don't mean——?"

"Yes," said March, quickly, as if the wound were still unpleasantly fresh.

"You don't intend giving it up?" she half entreated. March turned away.

"I have given it up," he answered, with sad brevity. She laid her hand softly on his shoulder.

"Poor Owen!" she said.

"No, you mustn't pity me. All reasonable persons would say that I ought to be congratulated."

He stroked her hand thoughtfully. Then he gave her a swift smile as he looked up and said,

"But we are not reasonable people." He gave a sigh which perhaps stood for a mingled emotion.

"No," said Constance, calmly. "It's much pleasanter," she added.

"Yes: but it has its disadvantages. If I were not unreasonable I should think myself well rid of a foolish philactery. As it is, I am saddened—saddened by a diminution of my faith in certain possibilities, of course; but chiefly that these men should lose by their folly all that those possibilities might have done for them."

"And you have disbanded the colony?" said Constance, bringing him back to the main facts.

"Yes, the colonists all professed to be very sorry and some of them were honestly repentant; but, of course,

that was the only thing. They would have disbanded without me. I don't know why they should be grieved when I save them the trouble."

"They loved you," exclaimed Constance.

"They are willing that I should bear the cost of their passage home," said March, tersely.

Constance smiled.

"Well, that is a proof of liking," she answered. "They wouldn't let every one do that."

They were silent for a moment.

"Owen, dear," said Constance, at length, "I seem very safe—very securely yours, sitting beside you here, don't I? But you don't know what may be going on in Judea—even at this moment."

Her voice shook and she made the first advance of her life in running her hand vaguely over his head.

"Oh, I didn't tell you—how could I tell you?" She drew herself away. "Owen, Mr. Keator is to decide it by the lot!"

"Constance!" he cried, aghast, as he started up.

"I feared you would feel so."

She bit her lip and tremulously turned her face to the sofa-back. He took her gently by the shoulder and drew her about.

"Constance! Constance dear, don't vex yourself about my feelings. Surely you have enough else. But why did you never tell me that this blind chance was to be the final judge between us? Why did you leave me in ignorance until now?"

"Until now it was never important. How could I dream of Mr. Keator's failure? What good would it have done you?" cried the girl, afflictedly. "And, you remember," she added, with the ghost of a smile, "that

you were interested in something else when I told you the story in the fly-gallery ? ”

“ Oh, never mind, dear ; never mind ! We have the fact now. That is enough. But I never thought of this ! ” exclaimed he, heavily. “ Do you think I should have been so light-hearted if I had imagined that this was all our happiness hung upon ? When you told me just now, I was a little shocked at Mr. Keator’s failure, but I was not surprised. Perhaps it is easier for me to understand it than for you.” He smiled faintly. “ In the nature of things you can’t appreciate the temptation. Still, I thought he would retreat.”

Constance sighed, remembering how he had endeavored to retreat and how she had prevented him.

“ Do you think *you* would ? ” she asked him, with melancholy gayety.

“ I’m not a clergyman. It’s not a question of sacrificing my ministry.”

“ That makes it harder. But he won’t turn back—not now.”

March turned away desperately and went over to the window. The ground was covered with snow, and the snowbirds were hopping about on its glistening surface and calling one another from the gaunt tree-tops.

“ He puts it beyond reparation by this public exhibition. If it is favorable to him—this lottery—he will not have the surrender of his ministry to restrain him. He will have lost all reason for remaining in the Church by linking your name with his in this devilish device of the lot. They talk of marriage as holy ! Think of deciding such a thing by the choice of bits of paper ! It is childish ! ” exclaimed March, pacing the room, “ It is hideous ! ”

Constance turned her anguished face to him.

“‘The lot is cast into the lap,’ ” she said, gently, with a memory of Mr. Keator’s solemn quotation ; “‘but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.’ ”

“It is natural that they should defend it with quotations,” returned March. “It must seem just and right to them. They would not do anything that did not, and no doubt it is as good a way as another. Marriages must be so much a matter of chance, in any event. But it’s hard ! ”

“He has my promise,” she said, quietly. “You must remember that ; and whatever the failure for him or ruin for us we mustn’t feel that he is going beyond that.”

Her hands were locked in her lap, and her face wore an expression of acute misery.

He sank into a seat beside her on the sofa and drew her to him.

“You are right, darling ; you are always right.” He kissed her softly. “And I am wrong. You will always find me so, I fear. Perhaps you might better accept Mr. Keator, however the lot decides.”

She gave him an indulgent smile, but — “Oh, we mustn’t laugh,” she said. “Think if it should come true ! ”

He caught her closer.

“Don’t talk of it, dearest. Talk of death, but don’t talk of my losing you ! ”

A light knock came at the door and she rose and took from one of the negro servants the mail-bag which Mr. Echols sent to Quinnimont daily. Among the letters she found one for herself.

“It is from Mr. Keator,” she exclaimed, softly, as she turned it over.

March waited silently while she opened it.

"It must have been written the day after we left," she murmured, as she began to read.

"What is it, dear!" asked March, at length. "Does he relent?"

She gave a hard little laugh.

"I have arranged all as you wish," she read. "We shall be taken together in the lot on Thursday. I will write."

"What does he mean?—'as you wish'?" asked March as he started up.

"He wanted to give it up—to retreat. When he had made his declaration he was sorry for it. But then, of course, it was for me to insist."

"And you insisted."

"Ah! you don't blame me, Owen? You wouldn't have had me do less?"

March bit his lip. He was a man and a lover; and her action had put his happiness in doubt—the happiness of both in cruel jeopardy. But he was stronger than that selfish sentiment. "Constance," he whispered impulsively, for answer, as he took her cheeks between his hands, "you are wonderful. It will always be my dearest privilege to have known you, even though we must always live apart."

She smiled. "It is to-day, you know," she said.

"Yes; Thursday. Even now they may be deciding our fate."

"We shall hear Saturday," she said, thoughtfully, as he drew his hands away.

"Not to be there to change or prevent: that is the bitter thing. Oh, Constance," he cried, "it is intolerable! We are standing by here with tied hands and our future is being parcelled out to us."

“ But parcelled out by God,” she said, wistfully.

He took up his hat and coat. Constance did not attempt to stay him.

“ Ah, let us hope so ! ” he said, with a groan.

He stooped and kissed her and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ROSE came into the library in her working-apron when she had heard her brother enter the house after his visit to Constance. He was sitting in his leathern chair with his head bowed upon his hand. She went softly over and touched him. He glanced up with a quick smile and drew her greedily down to him. He felt the isolation which follows every species of wrong. It seemed to him that he had put himself at odds with the world. Rose was his one sure friend. She was a companion sail upon a sea otherwise frightfully desolate.

She looked at him steadily a moment.

"You would rather not tell me, brother," she said, ever so gently.

"How do you guess so well, little sister?"

She nestled against him on the great arm-chair.

"Because I love you, I think," she answered, as she pressed her lips to his forehead.

He took her hand.

"Always love me, Rose. Promise me that you will," he begged.

She saw the piteous earnestness in his eyes. She perceived that he was much in earnest.

"I promise," returned she, simply.

"Whatever befalls?"

"Whatever befalls."

"Oh, I need your love, Rose! I shall need it more and more now."

It was a cruel trial to restrain the questions that were on her lips. She was deeply concerned ; she was fearful of she knew not what. But she bravely curbed her affectionate curiosity.

“Remember that I trust you,” was all she said ; “always remember that.”

“Am I likely to forget it ? It is because I am sure of your trust in me that I am going to make trial of it for a few days. Believe in me for as long as that, at all events. In good time you shall know all. I would not hide a word from you. But now—I shall be in sore need of all your faith in me for a day or two.” He turned away quickly. “I cannot cloud it. Bear with me for a little, Rose.”

“For always, brother,” and with the perfect tact of her love she slipped silently out of the room.

Her trust indeed sustained Mr. Keator in the days which followed. It was the single beacon by which he found his way in the fog which life had suddenly become.

The two days succeeding Constance's departure were always filled to his memory with a sickening confusion of thought. His mind seemed to have become a blank ; but it was the sort of blank on which delirium writes a thousand irrelevancies in her invisible ink, crossing and recrossing ; then burning them into intelligibility, and setting them instantly fading again. His brain whirled. He could not command it long enough to make with himself a consecutive argument of his situation. He came to his meals in a daze, and harassed Rose by sitting vacantly silent and eating nothing of the delicacies with which she strove to tempt him. When he kissed her good-night she could have wept for his haggard face.

Conrad tried to make him aware of his sympathy with

a trouble touching which he could frame no guess. But his well-intentioned kindness failed, as it had failed with March. Conrad came in secret to Mr. Keator just before the meeting of the elders for which Mr. Keator had now arranged and shyly begged that he might be taken in the lot with Dorothy Velt.

"I am glad to see you are thinking of marriage, Conrad," Mr. Keator said, kindly. "It is a great rock of safety for a minister." Conrad, keeping his face averted, and rolling between his teeth a grain of wheat which he had found an immense aid in the interview, answered,

"Yes, I should guess so. Sister Dorothy is a good girl and a proper housekeeper, I should suppose. I have noticed when she came to the *sprechens*—but that's neither here nor there. I wouldn't go for to choose any one especial—but the ministers see more of the sisters than the brethren, and—well, she's a sweet creature!"

At this innocent burst of admiration, Conrad blushed and Mr. Keator assured him that he would propose his name.

"But," he added, "you must not be disappointed if the lot decides against you. You will submit to the Lord's will, and even if the response should be favorable, you know, as a minister—for I shall want to see you ordained soon now, Conrad—your marriage will need the sanction of the Conference of the Elders' Unity. God grant that you may be blessed in your love, and that if you must sacrifice it, you may be given the strength," said Mr. Keator.

Mr. Keator was haunted by one purpose; pursued by Constance's demand that he submit this question, which had become the question of his life, to the lot. In the labyrinth in which he groped this path at least was clear,

and he followed it with the desperate tenacity of the madman who knows his one bit of knowledge so well. He did not look forward beyond the awful decision. He did not dare. If he considered a moment, in the forlorn strait to which he had come, he was certain that he should not go on. He clung to the letter of Constance's demand. That, at least, he could satisfy, and he went on about the preparations for carrying out her wish, finding a kind of salve to his conscience in the blessed sense of irresponsibility. Of his own motion he could never have done the thing for which he now carefully laid the train.

Several missionaries, as their wont was, had written him to provide wives for them at the first meeting of the Conference, and there were besides two young men in the settlement who had reached the marriageable age and were desirous of such partners as the lot might appoint to them. In the proper exercise of his power the minister had called a meeting of the Conference for the purpose of satisfying these wishes. Of his own determination he said nothing.

On Thursday morning the elders began to gather, in response to this summons, in the room at the rear of the church used for their deliberations. It was an apartment much employed by Mr. Keator in his own work, and in Summer it became his study, and he wrote all his sermons in it. The light flooded it through many generous windows, so deep set in the masonry, that the heat abandoned its mission before it reached the interior. In the Spring the lilac and syringa bushes, and the like simple shrubs, hung their fresh flowers in at the open casements; and before the little private door, through which in Summer the gentle mountain breeze made free of the room, a monster horse-chestnut from year to year sent

forth its trembling shoots, declared itself in swollen blossoms, shadowed the wall with its prodigal foliage, and finally in the Autumn sent it down in a shower for the minister to tramp through.

The room was very dear to him with its treasury of associations ; and as he looked about now at the walls decorated with portraits of the devoted laborers for the Church in the first hard years of its life in America, and at the long shelves burdened with memorials of their sufferings and conquests, he experienced a sudden pang. The hateful sense of the discordance of the thing he was about to do with all the mild virtue, the unpretending rigor, the scorn of wrong which the precious lives of these men had made vocal for all succeeding generations of the Church's ministers, sent a sharp pain through his heart. Was he not sworn to maintain the tradition of their stainless purity ?

The pure, benignant visage of Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Church, looked down at him out of one of the frames. It seemed to the minister's guilty fancy that a reproof contracted his open forehead. The firm lips, with their trace of sternness, appeared about to rebuke him for the dishonor he was about to bring upon himself and the Church.

Mr. Keator turned away uneasily, and from his removed seat watched the gathering of the elders. Was it possible that on the morrow he might have lost the right to sit among these good men, that his office of guide and counsellor might be filled by another, that another might make his own the associations that had so long been dearly his, that he might sit in this room composing admonitions to his flock and taking the scent of the lilac and syringa in the early Spring ? He looked at Count

Zinzendorf again ; he seemed to smile upon him encouragingly. He glanced at the elders ; but he did not need to look long. He knew how pitiless they could be. It was the crucial moment—the one reasonable moment at which he might have turned back.

But a suggestion of the devil insinuated itself. She had deceived him. She had wantonly broken her pledge—a pledge of whose value to him she best knew. The whisperings of forgiveness, of self-denial, which came to him from habit, he put impatiently away. What was the residuum of good in the world to him since she was false ? Should he be merciful ? Had she spared him ? Had she not herself urged him to what he was about to do ? It should mercilessly rebound upon her. But in the righteous wrath which suddenly possessed him he would not suffer her to accomplish this act of which he had for the first time a full, reckless perception of the wickedness. He would do it—he alone : John Keator—and because he wished to do it, not because she commanded it.

The eldress of the Single Sisters came in at length with her list, and all was ready. Mr. Keator motioned for silence, and forced himself to kneel down and pray for a benediction upon the decision of the solemn questions they were about to ask by the lot. Nothing had ever seemed to him so much like profanity ; but, as he went on, the real anguish which lay beneath any sense of the situation he could pretend to himself, translated itself in an honest fervor of petition. As he knelt there among all the officers of the Church, there came over him with smiting force a feeling of the tremendous consequence of the result ; and he prayed for the watchful providence of God with his whole soul, and as he had never prayed before.

He rose with a calmness in his heart, that he had not known since he had listened to the wandering suggestions of the dying man at Little Slab Hollow. He had the feeling, in which the weakness of humanity always finds comfort, of having transferred the responsibility. He would, indeed, ask for the trial of the lot for himself. But he left the result with God.

The eldress came over and showed him her list. Upon it were the names of a dozen members of the Single Sisters' Choir. Mr. Keator proposed the first upon the list, Benigna Gardenhauer, for the missionary who had sent from Greenland for a wife. The lot indicated that she was not acceptable. The minister who was willing to leave this delicate question to such an arbitrament, was of middle age and had already been married ; it was therefore thought best to select one of the more sedate sisters for the second challenge of the lot in his interest. Caroline Riddlemoser was therefore taken in the lot for Brother Fiedler. The decision was affirmative.

The other missionary, who was ministering among the native Indians in Ohio, was furnished with a spouse by the same simple and certain plan, and then Mr. Keator named two brothers in the settlement. These had each a choice, and the lot was first tried for the young women of their own selection. Upon the desire of one the lot smiled, but the wish of the other was denied to him, and Mr. Keator had recourse again to the eldress's list, upon which he presently found the name of a young woman to whom the lot assented.

Mr. Keator sat, while Conrad's name was proposed, with his head in his hands, meditating nervously upon the announcement that he was next to make. He said to himself that there was still time to draw back. Without

the sanction of his voice none of the brethren before him could be brought to believe that he had indulged such an intention. But an excess of the old feeling of proud resentment seized him. The "Yes" in answer to Conrad's question was pronounced, and Mr. Keator felt satisfaction in the result. He bade farewell to it as his last innocent thought, and rose hastily, his face set with determination. His fixed eyes beamed with the light of his resolve. The elders and eldress slowly rose to go.

Mr. Keator cleared his throat. One or two looked about at him.

"One moment, if you please ; there is something else," he said, firmly.

The moving company was instantly silent, and turned toward him with curiosity.

"There is another marriage to be decided," he told them, in the hard, dry tones which had replaced his gentle voice.

They came back slowly to their seats. He wound his fingers about his crutch while he waited for them to dispose themselves upon the chairs. His mood seemed to oppress and half awe them, for they sat down in wondering silence. The tremor which had affected him when he began had left him, and he had never been more calm than when he faced them at length.

"It is my own marriage," he said, briefly.

A hesitant murmur of pleasure ran about the little assembly. Then Elder Weiss's "I'm sure we are very glad," broke the heavy silence.

"It is to Sister Constance Van Cleef," pursued the minister.

It was as if he had cast a grenade among them. He confronted their bewildered faces and knitted brows

with a hard, unyielding glance. For a moment his look beat down all opposition. But almost immediately Elder Weiss exclaimed in a tone of triumph,

“She is not a sister !”

“Who degraded her ?” asked Mr. Keator.

The elder hesitated and looked about him. The glances of the brethren unconsciously supported him, and seemed to make him their spokesman.

“You did, in the church,” he answered, doggedly.

“Say rather you, Elder Weiss.”

Mr. Keator had always felt aggrieved by the manner of Elder Weiss’s reproof. But he had hitherto opposed to this the feeling that he had asked him to do a disagreeable thing for him, and that to complain that he had done it would be ungracious. That it had been a brutal speech, however, always remained ; and Elder Weiss’s casting of the odious burden upon him was, in consideration of all the circumstances, scarcely tolerable. The minister remembered, with sudden energy, what that speech had cost him, and he let his wrath pour itself forth.

“Do you fancy,” he asked, “that I should have rebuked her as if she were a criminal ? Do you dare suppose that I could have made such an unfeeling speech ?”

Elder Weiss regarded the wall interestedly ; the other elders and the prim little eldress watched the minister in a kind of dumb horror. Mr. Keator paused an instant to control himself. He was fearful of going too far, and he meant only to be just.

“I shall ask you, Brother Weiss,” he said, “to tell me whose prerogative you suppose it to be to dismiss from the Church ?”

The elder was silent, and at last portly Brother Berg, looking about for countenance, murmured : “I should

suppose it was the minister's, with proper consultation with the elders."

"Surely," assented Mr. Keator, glancing commandingly down upon them from where he stood. "If I read the canons of the Church aright, it is only your pastor who had the right to banish Sister Constance Van Cleef from the Sisterhood to whose precious privileges she had been admitted. I assure all of you that I have not used that right, and I ask as a minister of the Church to be taken in the lot with one of its members."

"The Conference of the Elders' Unity will not consent," asserted Elder Weiss, with conviction.

Mr. Keator paid no attention to this.

"Are the brethren ready?" he asked, quietly, but his heart began a riotous beating.

Elder Berg looked at Elder Englehardt.

"I suppose so," said the latter, reluctantly.

They were a long time fumbling about the lots. Mr. Keator began to feel the reaction setting in. He could face this company of sullen opponents; he could condemn himself before them to resign the pastorate in which he had so long kept their love and confidence, he could carry his ruin proudly out as if it were a triumph; but he was not strong enough to confront the terrible balance of fates, now in process of decision. He sank into a chair with his back to the whole gathering, and stared wistfully, tremulously out of the window at the bare lilac and syringa bushes.

It seemed a century, and he listened in an anguish beyond anything that he had ever known to their hurried, whispered conference, their deliberate movements about the room, their clumsy fingering of the lots, which he seemed almost to hear rustle in their fingers.

At last he heard a sudden stir and an exclamation. He did not look about. Then they seemed slowly to leave the room. He held himself in his chair as they filed solemnly out, one by one. When the room at length appeared empty he caught the sound of a shuffling step behind him, and Brother Berg touched his arm. Mr. Keator looked up with an agony of question in his face.

The elder, whose constant smile had fled, as it seemed, permanently, handed him a slip of paper with a single word upon it.

The letters seemed to burn their way into Mr. Keator's consciousness.

"Yes."

The minister flung himself forward.

"My God ! my God !" he cried.

Brother Berg looked at him with a great pity in his eyes. But he turned doubtfully away. Then suddenly he came back and put forth his hand. Mr. Keator perhaps felt it beside him, for in his misery he stretched out his own without lifting his head. Brother Berg clasped it with honest warmth ; and went precipitately from the room. The minister crouched forward, alone with his conscience and his God.

"The minister crouched forward, alone with his conscience and his God."





CHAPTER XXX.

THE knowledge of all that he had kept from her must have been interpreted in his face when he met Rose, for her look of tender solicitude melted into a kind of diffident reproach.

"Yes, I have done it," he said, bitterly, in answer to her glance.

He sank into his deep library chair with his face full of a fixed gloom.

Rose observed him with a pain deeper than she could say.

"O, John, John, how could you!" she whispered, as she dropped down beside him.

"You remember what you said," he rejoined, coldly.

"Yes, yes," cried Rose, though her tears, "but I can't. How could I despise you when now, above all, you need my help and love. And perhaps you do not deserve that I should, John," she said softly, drying her eyes. "No, it can't be. It is your modesty again, your readiness to condemn yourself."

"Do you think those are words for my acts? I demanded the fulfillment of her promise."

"Brother!" she cried.

She withdrew herself swiftly; but as quickly touched him to whisper,

"Think of your provocation, John; you are noble and good, but how could any one be good enough for that? No, no! it's impossible! She tempted you too far."

"Look at it in that way if you can, sister. Perhaps I had some excuse."

"Some! You had every excuse. I never dreamed of such a contingency when I talked of your failing. Do! What else could you do? What could any one do? It was the only thing."

"But it was not the priestly thing. Oh, Rose dear, other men may be governed by men's standards, but the standards of a minister of Christ can come only from the Head and Founder of his order."

Rose was silent.

"Is there anything else?" she asked, gently, at last.

"Everything! After I had made my demand of her I felt a horror of what I had done. I attempted to retract it."

"Of course! Of course! Oh, John, don't let us talk of your failure. Who else would have done that?"

"I don't know, dear, but it was poor reparation and she would not take it."

"Would not take it?" repeated Rose, in surprise. Then suddenly: "John, doesn't that prove what I have always said? She loves you."

A pitiful smile flitted over the minister's face.

"Nay, she is proud, exquisitely proud. That is all. And then she said I must decide it by the lot, as we had agreed."

Rose's lips quivered.

"And you have done it? Oh, John! John!"

"You may well reproach me. I did it deliberately—in the face of the elders."

He pressed his head into his hands.

Rose looked up with a brave smile. "She forced you to it," she said.

"No, no ; don't show me the way to such wretched shifting as that. I did it—I alone. I am willing to suffer for it."

Rose cast her head upon his knees. When she raised it, it was to ask him fearfully,

"The answer, John ! What was the answer ?"

He gazed into her gentle eyes a moment, in thought.

"'Yes,' " he said, at last, simply.

She regarded him for a moment in a daze.

"You must leave the Church to marry her," she said, her face full of sorrow.

Mr. Keator started up. As he leaned upon his crutch, he glanced down upon her kneeling by the chair, with a grieving look.

"Marry her ?" exclaimed he. "No, no. You are confused by the propitiousness of it, dear."

Rose was about to speak ; but he continued, "Yes, I was tempted. Was that what you were going to say. It is true that when the lot said 'Yes' a bitter temptation had its will with me. But you can not think I could yield to it at last. Have I fallen so far that you have no better thought for me ?"

"Forgive me !" she begged.

"Nay, you were right. How can I expect you to keep high theories for my low practices." She made a deprecatory murmur, but he went on. "Ah, my one wrong puts me at odds with the whole frame of things !" exclaimed he, bitterly.

He paused a moment.

"I have gone very far, dear, but even to me some things are still impossible. That, I am sure, is one of them. Do you think I could ever have a peaceful hour ? Do you think life with her would be worth anything,

stained by the thought of what it had cost? Your trust in me is dearer to me than that; my self-respect has more value. An ability to one day face my Maker is infinitely more precious than all the happiness I might hope to find in such an unblessed union."

Rose tried to speak, but he raised her up, with a far-away look in his eyes and went quickly on.

"At first the temptation shone upon me in a glory for which I was not strong enough. But the still voice drew me back instantly. It was like looking over a precipice for the fascination of it; it was not, thank heaven, even for a moment a real intention. I *saw* then!" exclaimed he, as he threw back his head. There was the light of a great joy in his eyes. "Rose, dear, don't you see?"

"I see your goodness, John."

"The hand of Providence is in it all," declared he, with solemn gratitude. "Don't you understand, Rose? God will not see my life-work for Him discredited by my personal failure—He will not see it come to naught because His weak human agent has not been worthy. Through my sin He leads me out to a deeper knowledge of myself and Him, and a richer power of labor in His cause. In His infinite mercy He gives me another opportunity."

The minister paused with a deep inspiration.

"Oh, Rose," he went on with the impetus of his rapture, "do you not see what a ruin all my future must have been if the word of the lot had been 'No?' Do you not see that it would seem to have balked my wicked desire? I should have lost the inestimable privilege of refusing the good securely within my reach. I can't tell you how happy it has made me. It puts the whole mat-

ter upon the footing of the original trial. It rehabilitates my self-respect. It enables me to look up, to be a man among men."

He seemed borne along on the splendid reaches of his imagination. His buoyant fancy had reconstructed for him in a moment his whole life. He looked into the future with gladdened eyes.

A joyous light dawned upon Rose's face. She flung her arms around his neck.

"I have my brother back again," she whispered.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARCH was sitting Saturday morning in the room in which he had learned of the blind arbitrament that was to decide the future of three lives. Constance sat near him sewing, an occupation in which she endeavored to find relief for her overburdened thoughts. From time to time they spoke wandringly of the event which so nearly concerned them ; but their interest was too deep for conversation upon that subject. Occasionally March got up and went to the window, from which he cast his eye rather wearily over the landscape as if he expected to see something start up out of it. Once he saw a rabbit break covert and leap for a moment over the snow ; a chipmunk came out of the stone wall and ran gaily along that rugged highway.

They were awaiting the arrival of the mail, for which the servant had been sent into town as usual.

"Owen, I heard something very pleasant yesterday," said Constance, as he turned away from the window, and came back to her side. "Jacinth has agreed to marry Mr. Lincoln. I have hoped for it ever since I made them known to each other and perceived his interest in her. But I haven't dared believe it possible. It is hard to guess Jacinth's feelings about anything, she says so little, and I was afraid she wouldn't see that Mr. Lincoln was the man of all men she ought to like, because to a casual observer he must seem the last man fitted for her."

"She has evidently observed him more than casually," returned March, "and has been gifted, if only for a moment, with your wonderful insight." His tone was less light hearted than his speech, and he rose restlessly and walked over to the window to take an anxious look down the road along which the man would come with the mail.

"You are glad for Mr. Lincoln, Owen?" rejoined Constance, inquiringly.

"Heartily, dearest, heartily!" exclaimed March, turning from the window and coming quickly over to her. "Don't think I don't sympathize with your pleasure in the arrangement, because of my lame raillery. Nothing could be better. Only I'm not in a mood to rejoice about anything—even in my friend's happiness in his love, selfish fellow that I am!" he ended, looking down into her eyes, as he took her hands with a doubtful smile.

"We should be glad that every one is not so unfortunate as we in their—their affairs," said she.

"Oh yes, yes," cried March, "we should be. And we are! Glad? We are riotously glad! Observe our joy!" His nervous laugh struck harshly upon Constance. She turned away to hide her tears—tears for his wretchedness and hers.

But March at the moment caught sight through the window of the man with the mail pouch, and going quickly out he took the bag from him. He brought it in and dropped it in her lap with a wistful smile. Then he sat down and ran his hand nervously through his hair.

Constance took up the pouch eagerly.

"The key, Owen!" she murmured, helplessly.

She pushed her hand swiftly through her work basket. March suppressed an exclamation as she looked uncer-

tainly about her. She put down her work and went over to the mantel. As her fingers touched the bit of metal she gave a low note of pleasure.

They opened the pouch fumblingly together. There seemed an unusually large mail. The letter they sought was among the last.

"Tear it, dear!" cried March, as she took up her penknife.

But she was willing to postpone the knowledge before which she began to tremble, and, as was her custom, cut the seal.

"You hold our fate in your hands," said March, in a low voice, as she balanced the unopened letter.

She unfolded the paper. The writing on it appeared brief.

"The lot has been taken," she read. "The word was — 'Yes.'"

March started up in anguish.

"Listen, dear!" exclaimed Constance, softly: "'Need I tell you that nothing in my life has ever given me so much happiness?'"

March gave a low cry of rage and clenched his hands.

Constance read on through a mist of tears.

"Oh, read it, Owen!" she cried, with a look of bewildered joy in her face. "I can't!"

He took it from her. This is what he read:

"It enables me to refuse the infinite happiness it offers me. You can understand how this replaces the trial which your generosity gave me; and suffers me to conquer the bitterest temptation I have known. I can not too deeply thank you for forcing it upon me. Bless you, my sweet girl! It has restored me to myself. You once wisely refused to let me give you up, but you will permit

it, I am sure, now, and help me to bind fast my poor surrender by uniting you, when the time comes, to Mr. March."

"How brave!" she exclaimed, as she slipped into his waiting arms.

For a moment they silently tasted their bliss; the new, sweet sense of security was too precious to be touched even by the grateful memory of Mr. Keator. But they came back to it almost immediately, and Constance said,

"How could such a man even seem to fail? I couldn't understand it when he came to me with his request—in the very act of his apparent fall. I understand it less than ever."

"How does he know about us?" asked March reasonably.

"Owen," she cried, with conviction, "that is it!" She started away from him. "Only to think of my not seeing that!"

"What, dear?"

"That in some way he has mistaken our relation for a betrothal, and found that a treason in me. Poor Mr. Keator! If he fancied that, what might he not have done! What had I not given him the right to do? It was a fine restraint in him to go no further. And I have been ignorantly blaming him! Oh, I can't be too glad, Owen, that he has made this last, final sacrifice in the face of that, not having learned the truth."

"It gives it a great dignity," said March, simply.

"Does it not? A dignity to which the best triumph he might have won over his first temptation would be slight. Who is better than Mr. Keator, Owen?"

He smiled in her face.

"Not I, darling. I shall always feel my great responsi-

bility—remembering that you might have been the wife of such a man.”

A month later they were married. The rare tears were in Constance's eyes from many causes as she went up the aisle upon Mr. Echols's arm. It was of her father that she was especially thinking; she believed that he would be glad to see her walking toward the stalwart figure she mistily saw through her suffused eyes. But no tears were visible as Mr. Keator stooped over, when he had married them by the Moravian ritual, and reverently kissed her.

It was afterward, when she attempted to tell him of his error and to thank him for the abnegation which had made her happiness possible, that she found cause to weep. But it was for joy.

Constance's experience had come to her at last, as it comes best and most richly to all women. It was strangely simple. In the old days when she had longed for it her imagination had not looked forward to a thing of so every-day a quality as wedded happiness. But, to her understanding eyes, every-dayness finally seemed not the least good thing in the world, if it was every-day content: and she was done forever with the superstition of that other day, to come illuminatingly into an early future and be somehow a finer and larger day than ever was, for the reason that she had learned to find a sufficing joy in each day as it passed.

She was never less than the alert, sensitive spirit that had won March in the old garden at Judea; but as the little world of which she was securely queen revealed its calm joys to her, she was in every way gentled. Love,

which had wrought this in her, instructed, as well, a pride which was at length merely the dignity that became Sir Owen March's wife. Upon her husband she leaned with a dear sense of security, and it is fair to record that March did not grow less worthy of her devotion. When he succeeded to his father's title he did not relinquish his theories because he had become one of a class whom such theories could not profit. On the contrary he accepted his increased power for good to others as a trust, and found one of the best pleasures of his life in domesticating upon his native soil the effort toward better things which he had crossed the ocean to further. His visit to America in failing of its aim had enriched him beyond all hope in making Constance known to him. And was she not now by his side to help forward the very work in which they had labored together at Gerrit? March was very happy, but life even to an English baronet, is, of course, not a perfectly smooth and kindly affair, and if he kept to the end his obstinately cheerful outlook, it was not because he was ignorant how much of pain and difficulty must enter into every human history.

From Mr. Keator, at the station in the West Indies, which Constance had forced him to accept, they seldom heard. But Rose, who complained that her brother's refusal to share his work with her left her idle hours, wrote more frequently. The letters, from whichever they came, revived always for March and Constance memories which they meant never to lose; and sometimes when it was Mr. Keator who wrote they liked to make anew to each other the acknowledgment of their debt to him. The story of his sacrifice had been rehearsed between them as often as the story of their love, but, like that, it was endeared by familiarity.

"He gave us to each other," Constance was saying, as she sat next her husband in the soft English twilight, and looked musingly out on the mellow Devonshire landscape. "It is a sacred charge to remember that. He might have separated us. He might have taken his own selfish joy. It was his and he refused it."

"It's not the kind of debt that one can pay," said March, briefly.

"No, Owen ; but it is better so. I like to think that there is one man—besides you, of course, Owen, who could do a fine thing like that, a thing which cost him everything, with no richer reward than his conscience may bring him. That is why he has always been so dear to me, I think—because of the calm strength that was so solidly related to the suffering of the world, so finely, almost sadly unrelated to everything else in it. His unconscious, habitual charity and self-denial seemed always to point the way, and beckon me. But more than all they kept before me the certainty that there were still ideals—ideals upon which I could always draw. The certainty of that cheers me even now, Owen. No distance changes it. And, though we never see him again, so long as he lives it must be a great happiness to know that somewhere there is such a man."

It was a year later that intelligence reached them of an occurrence which seemed to Constance the most grievous that she had ever known. Rose wrote them of it—Rose, who was even then on her way to Judea to lay her brother's body away in the larch-shaded cemetery on the knoll, and who presently came to them with her immeasurable grief.

"He had gone," ran her pitiful letter, "in a surf-boat

to console the dying moments of a native, who in health had reviled him and his work. The sea was roughening when he set out. I begged him not to go. He said it was his duty. I knew it and knew that if it was, nothing could hinder his going. The cruel water, which has taken him from me, sent a foreboding through me. But he went. He went, and he never came back. For a storm rose in the night, and when we looked on the beach in the morning the boat was there overturned, and a little way off—John, cold, silent, with his face to the sky. The waves which had slain him came rippling about his head as if they had done no wrong."



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